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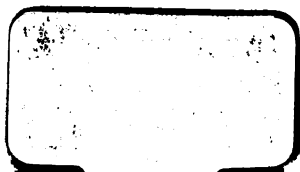
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"MONSIEUR LOVE."

BY

ETHEL COXON.

"There's no dallying with Love,
Though he be a child and blind ;
Then let none the danger prove,
Who would to himself be kind ;
Smile he does when thou dost play,
But his smiles to death betray."—SHERRBURNE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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“MONSIEUR LOVE.”

CHAPTER I.

“Yet I will but say what mere friends say,

Or only a thought stronger.

I will hold your hand but so long as all may,

Or so very little longer.”

BROWNING.—“THE LOST MISTRESS.”

IT was the evening of the Rolts' ball, dinner was over at Thurloe Square, and Victoire ran upstairs in the fading daylight to her room, where on the bed lay a silvery glimmer of silk and gauze, her first ball dress.

She put on her white dressing-gown, and unfastened the thick coil of her hair ; hair brushing is conducive to a meditative frame of mind, and after passing the brush over her hair for a few minutes, she forgot to proceed and a little sigh escaped her.

Frank had never fulfilled his promise of calling, and the girl, knowing nothing of the irresolution which had prevented him, had watched and hoped day after day, and day after day had felt the sick weariness of disappointment.

Her love or her sense of it had been kindled to a quicker life since that evening at the 'Areopagus,' and she longed for a sight of Frank ; she did not want love words or love glances, only the mere sweetness of his presence.

She was still sitting so, when her aunt opened the door.

"Haven't you begun to dress yet, you bad child? I came to ask if Perry should do your hair before she attends to me?"

"Oh, no, Aunt Julia, I can do it myself, I would rather, really."

"Very well, only make haste," said Mrs. Treherne as she left the room.

Victoire obeyed her aunt's injunction, and the result of her toilette was satisfactory, at least so she thought herself, as she stood "like Psyche with the lamp-light in her hand," to inspect herself in the glass.

Her dress was white, and soft, and sheeny as the pearls round her throat, and clinging round her slight figure in undulating lines, made her seem taller than

she really was, her cheeks were rather flushed, her eyes lustrous, and the wreath of stephanotis and fern, which crowned her bronze ripples of hair, suited the small head well.

"I wonder if I am pretty," she thought, "I suppose I am in this dress, but where is the use?"

What use to be fair in others' eyes if he would not see her?

She leant her head on her hand, and went back again to those autumn days; she was roused by the maid's tap at the door and, catching up her creamy drapery, ran quickly downstairs; despite of love-lornity, it would be strange if one did not, at eighteen, enjoy the thought of one's first ball.

"Very well got up," said her uncle approvingly, as she entered the drawing-

room, "I feel quite abashed at escorting two such howling swells."

"Don't, Uncle George," said Victoire, laughing, "but oh! auntie, you do look—" as Mrs. Treherne entered, splendid in trailing robes of pale green silk.

"You've chosen this child's dress very well," said her husband, as he buttoned her long gloves, "it looks fresh."

"I know you consider that the highest praise," said his wife, "but it's rather disappointing, as you bestow it equally on a clear cambric. You haven't got those flowers quite right though," she added, arranging the cluster of white blossoms on Victoire's breast.

"Half-past ten, is the carriage here?"

"Yes, I see it outside," said Victoire, peeping through the blind.

"Then that's all right, it's a fine night that's a comfort."

The novelty of a large ball dazed Victoire a little, and it was a few minutes after they had entered the Rolts' drawing-room, before she had entirely collected herself and could enjoy the scene. One of the Rolt girls had introduced a man to her, but he was already pretty deeply engaged, and after writing his name low down in her programme, left her by her aunt's side.

"I wonder if Raymond has come yet?" said Mrs. Treherne.

Victoire did not answer, her heart was beating nervously, almost painfully, as she tried to distinguish a man who had just entered the room.

Surely it was Frank, his face was turned away, but she could not mistake the air of the head; she was not mistaken, he turned and in a few more moments was at their side.

"Are you engaged for this waltz, Miss Treherne?" he said, when he had shaken hands with her uncle and aunt.

Victoire smiled and showed her nearly blank ball card.

"May I have it then?" and as Victoire answered he had offered his arm, and with a few steps swung her into the crowd of dancers.

She had never danced among a throng before, and it confused her, Frank saw it and said,

"Don't be afraid, I steer tolerably well and we shan't come to grief."

He was a perfect dancer, the girl soon

discovered it, and trusted to his strong arm and close hand clasp.

The charm of a waltz, the intense pleasure of swift motion "*ohne hast, ohne rast*" Victoire had known before, but no waltz had ever been like this one to her.

"Are you tired?" Frank said at last.

She shook her head, but at that moment the dance came to rather a sudden end, and Frank led her down to the refreshment room, supplied her with an ice, and then said,

"There's a couch outside this room, it's cooler out there than in this place, shall we take possession of it?"

Victoire assented; the couch Frank had mentioned was in a small alcove. Mr. Lyndon led her there and sat down by her side.

"I have been meaning to come and see you," he said. "May I?"

"Of course, if you like," she tried to speak lightly, and failed as she saw his eyes bent on her with the look she remembered.

"It is if you like, Victoire—Miss Treherne," then as she hesitated, doubting what to say, he added in a low voice: "You need not be afraid."

She knew what he meant, that she need fear no mention of love from him.

"But," he said, and his voice was so pleading and tender, she could not have denied him for that one moment a larger boon than he asked, "you will let me see you sometimes, will you not?"

"You must decide;" she could not trust herself to say more, she was

frightened lest he should read in her looks or voice of the passion of her love.

"I shall come," he answered; then with an abrupt transition, "do you ever act now?"

"I have not for a long time."

"Why? Has your love for it died out?"

"I don't know, I think—" she stopped for a moment, then said frankly, "I don't think I ever had any real talent; but life was quiet, and I wanted dreams and something more than I really had. Now that I am beginning to know life (Frank's lip quivered with a smile but not a gay one) dreams are of no use, I know them as so untrue."

"Are you so wise, you were not once so wise," he tried to quote the words

gaily, but there was a great sadness in his tone.

Victoire felt it in her heart but she only answered, "I am older and wiser both."

"Ah! and happier?"

"Besides," she said ignoring his remark, "what would be the use of encouraging any stage madness, it would only end in disappointment, I should never be allowed to act."

"I am glad of it," he said earnestly, "don't think me unkind, but the stage would never do for you. You do not know what the life is; it would—no, it could not spoil you, but I could not bear to think of you under its influence."

Raymond had said nearly the same thing the other day, and Victoire had resented it hotly, yet Frank's words only

made her heart throb with happiness as she answered like a docile child.

"I never shall be," and then inconsistently enough, she sighed.

"I know it is hard," he said, and it was the sigh not the words which he answered, "I know by your power what it must be to you, but you have not seen what I have seen, you cannot know what I know; you are apart from it all, keep so."

She did not answer.

"You wonder why I stick to it myself," he went on. "It can hardly hurt me," he spoke bitterly; "it is not likely to tarnish my freshness, is it? and I do love my profession; besides that, I can do more in it than any other, it fascinates one, I could not leave it if I would."

"And yet——"

"And yet I would never let you——"
he checked himself; what right had he to speak so?

She was not angry, it seemed to her so natural, his influence over her, that she forgot its origin was the love she had denied mention of.

But he remembered it, and said no more; the notes of the next waltz sounded from the ball-room.

"Will you dance this with me?" he said.

Victoire was still so ignorant of ball-room conventionalities, that she would have danced straight through the programme with him, without an idea that she was thereby offending Mrs. Grundy, so she assented.

The waltz was one of the best of

Strauss' sugary and soulless insipidities, it had *verve*, and even grace, when played well and not heard too often.

Victoire danced well, and was as light as a feather, Frank's step suited hers, being long and smooth, and as they swayed to the rhythmical movement, the very quietness and good form of their dancing attracted remark by its distinction from the mad variety of "hops," "slides," "lurches," "springs," and "dips," in which most of the dancers indulged.

"That's what I call a pretty girl," said a young man who was standing at the door of the room with two others who had just arrived, Raymond Marchant and Dal Gordon.

"Which one?" said Dal, who was slowly

drawing on an immaculate glove, "point her out."

"There, all in white, dancing with that dark fellow, I know his face, but confound me! if I can remember his name."

"His partner is Miss Treherne, my cousin," said Raymond.

"Your cousin, you'll introduce me?"

"As soon as I can."

Raymond was looking intently at Victoire and Frank, there was no reason for his being angry, but he felt so all the same.

"I know the man too, but can't think how. Dal, do you know?"

Dal raised his eyes from the contemplation of his glove, which he was vainly endeavouring to button.

"Who? 'the fair swain who dances

with your daughter,' I mean cousin ? don't know him from Adam ; yes, I do though, it's Lyndon the actor !"

"By Jove ! so it is !" exclaimed their companion ; Raymond said nothing, but his face grew very dark and he moved away.

He wanted to find his uncle or aunt, but the latter was dancing and the former nowhere to be seen, so Raymond had to wait till the conclusion of the dance, when he went up to Mrs. Treherne and shook hands.

"How do you do, Raymond, have you only just come ?"

"Yes," and then there was a crush and a general move downstairs, and Raymond was separated from his aunt and her partner.

When he looked round they had left

the room, and so apparently had Victoire and her objectionable companion.

"Oh! Raymond, here you are," said his uncle, entering the room. "Have you spoken to Victoire yet?"

"No, she was dancing when I came, and I can't find her now."

"Yes, she is monopolized by an old acquaintance."

Raymond tried to control his voice and face as he answered,

"When I saw her, I fancied her partner was Lyndon, the actor."

"He is an old acquaintance."

"What do you mean, Uncle George?"

"Didn't you ever hear of his being down at Polwhyn last August?"

"No, I was in France, you know."

"So you were; well, he was down there fishing, and I made his acquaint-

ance in rather an odd manner ; then your grandmother asked him up to the house, and he turned out to be the grandson of that great friend of hers when a girl, the original of that miniature she has, Marian Borlase."

Raymond answered never a word, he was angrily, bitterly jealous ; why had he never known of all this ?

But then he remembered that when he had heard last September that Victoire was away, he had availed himself of a long deferred engagement to some of his father's relations to write a note postponing his visit to Polwhyn, and that his bronchitis having, as before mentioned, kept him in London at Christmas, Victoire and her grandmother naturally thought the chance visit of a stranger too unimportant a circumstance to men-

tion in a letter; he made this out clearly to himself, but he still felt aggrieved.

"Have you seen him before to-night, since you have been in town?"

"Why you yourself took our stalls for the 'Areopagus!'" (Raymond remembered it only too clearly,) "and we met him there; he came round to the front and was introduced to your aunt; I think she asked him to call," said Mr. Treherne, placidly.

Raymond was so angry that he felt he must speak.

"Do you think, Sir, that a man like that is a good acquaintance for Victoire."

"A man like that!" Mr. Treherne stared at his nephew; there was a gleam of amusement in his eyes, he had long

thought Raymond too assuming, and longed for the opportunity of snubbing him, which the young gentleman seemed about to afford him.

"You know what I mean." The young man was so angry he could not keep his temper down.

"Are you engaged to Victoire?" was his uncle's calm reply, Raymond's rudeness had not affected his tone in the least.

It was now Raymond's turn to stare.

"Because if you are," continued Mr. Treherne, serenely, "I admit your right to look after her; but if you are not, I really think you may leave it to my mother and ourselves. My dear boy, you know you are only Victoire's first cousin, and five years her senior, after all."

Raymond had a large fund of candid good sense, and he never showed it more clearly than he did in his answer.

"I beg your pardon, Uncle George, if I seemed impertinent; I suppose you are right."

Perhaps the apology was rather grudgingly given, but it was a difficult thing to do graciously, and so Mr. Treherne felt.

"If I were you, though," he said, "I should go and search out Victoire; I saw your aunt and Lady Rolt introducing men to her at such a rate, that if you don't make haste she won't have a dance left."

"Thank you, Sir," and Raymond hurried off.

"He's a good fellow enough," thought

Mr. Treherne, "and has brains and to spare, but he is an awful prig. Please Heaven Charlie doesn't grow up like him."

Raymond took his uncle's advice, and left the room in search of Victoire; he still felt irritated, and his temper was not improved when he found her and Mrs. Treherne together, talking to Frank.

The girl welcomed her cousin gladly, but a little nervously, and he and Frank surveyed each other with anything but an amiable expression. Mr. Lyndon had the best of it, for his languid, rather haughty grace made Raymond awkward and uncomfortable.

"Hang the fellow and his theatrical airs!" was Mr. Marchant's inward reflection, but it did not make him more

comfortable, because he knew it to be utterly unjust, and that Frank was as free from the smell of the lamps as he himself was.

Raymond asked Victoire for a dance, and really did his best to keep down his ill-temper; she, seeing he was annoyed, though she did not guess the cause, tried her best to soothe him, and had nearly succeeded when Dal Gordon came up to claim her for the next dance, and she went upstairs with him, saying as she left Raymond,

"I have kept No. 6 for you, Raymond."

He smiled back in answer; he had no fear or jealousy of Dal, but when Frank, who had engaged Mrs. Treherne for the dance just beginning, offered her his arm and they left the refreshment-room,

poor Raymond felt himself left out in the cold, and found the sensation unpleasant.

He poured out a large glass of claret cup, and drank it gloomily; to do him justice, there was some excuse for his ill humour; the first touch of jealousy is sore and torturing, and the knowledge he had gained to-night of Victoire's acquaintanceship with a man to whom he himself could not hold a candle in the points of manners and looks, was no joke to him, but grim earnest, as earnest as was his love for Victoire.

He was longing to know more, and the interval of time before his dance with Victoire arrived, seemed intolerably long; but all his temper vanished when she came up to him on Dal Gordon's arm, she looked far more than merely pretty

to-night, with her deepened colour and shining eyes, and soft shimmering dress; she was laughing at some reminiscences of Dal's visit to Polwhyn, and appealed to Raymond to settle a disputed point.

The three were deep in conversation, when Dal was suddenly pounced down upon by a tall and terrible young woman, with a hooked nose and a blood-red dress supposed to be equally artistic and fashionable, who took possession of Dal with an, "Our dance I think, Mr. Gordon," and as they went upstairs, let loose on him the horrors of amateur æsthetic conversation.

"What a Gorgon!" said Raymond, as his devoted friend was borne off. "How did you get on with Dal in the dancing line, Vic?"

Victoire smiled. "He does dance so queerly, very well, but just as he talks sometimes, as though he were half asleep, and with his eyes looking at the floor; I felt inclined to shake him."

"It would do him a great deal of good."

"Oh! I wasn't in earnest."

"I am. He's idleness itself in everything but foot ball; I don't know how much of it is assumed, but the dog, who laid his head against a wall to bark, was a joke to Dal."

"How do you mean?"

"I should think you could see, I'll give you an instance. I went down to stay at his father's place last year, now Dal is awfully fond of music, and his sister told me he had what she called 'a lovely touch.' According to her 'a touch' is

a thing born not made, and very seldom born too."

"Yes?"

"Well this gift, it appears, Dal has, but he is so lazy that he never practises; at last, one day, Miss Gordon pulled him by main force to the piano to play a duet with her. Sweet harmony for some time, then dead silence on Dal's part.

"'What is it?' said his sister.

"'I can't manage this bit,' answered Dal, 'you do it.'

"Down dashed Miss Gordon's hands and accomplished the difficulty, and then Dal strummed placidly on again, and so it went on. A shaking on a very large scale would do him no end of good."

"Why don't you do it then?"

"Because I am getting rather tired of tutoring."

"Have I wearied you with it?"

"No, but——"

"Are you going to scold?" and she looked up in his face smiling, "what is my last sin, Raymond?"

He answered her smile as he said, "Nothing very terrible, and Uncle George snubbed me for noticing it."

"But what was it? do tell me."

"I don't quite care to see you dancing and talking with fellows of Lyndon's stamp. Of course, now Uncle George has told me about his being at Polwhyn," he did not care to look at Victoire's face, or he would have seen her expression change, "I see you couldn't refuse him one dance, but I shouldn't give him more."

He had not known how Victoire would take it, she turned and said almost with a flash of sharp temper.

"What do you know against him?"

"Nothing of him personally; I speak from general experience."

"And I from personal; I know Mr. Lyndon and I like him," she spoke bravely, but oh! the quiver of pain and love that thrilled through her.

"I knew you would tell me I had no right to interfere," said Raymond coldly.

"But I don't; oh! don't be offended, I am sorry I spoke rudely," she said, putting her hand on his arm. The look, the action, the tone, were those of the Victoire he had always known, not of the girl whose looks and tones had startled him a moment ago; he could not re-

sist her sweet pleading, and answered frankly.

"It was I who was in the wrong, and ought to apologise, Vic. I won't say a word more, will that do? and now let's go upstairs, or we shall miss our dance."

Raymond had not gained much by speaking out his cause of displeasure; he could not be angry with Victoire, but his feelings towards Frank were the reverse of charitable, nor, when he saw Mr. Lyndon again dancing with Victoire, did their nature soften.

"Going so early, Raymond?" said Dal Gordon, as he saw him leaving.

"Yes, I'm tired of the affair, good-night."

"I'll go with you, there are sufficient men to allow one to leave with a clear conscience."

This was a good two hours before Victoire left; Frank cloaked her and handed her and Mrs. Treherne to the carriage as he had at the theatre, his last words to her were low.

"I shall come and see you very soon, now *you* say I may."





CHAPTER III.

“He comes too near who comes to be denied.”

“**W**HAT news?” inquired Mr. Treherne of his wife as he entered the dining room at Thurloe Square, one morning in June, and sat himself down at the breakfast table.

“I haven’t opened the letters yet, but there’s one from the mother,” said Mrs. Treherne, who was making the tea.

"Keep that till the last then, you seem to have a formidable correspondence; I've only three, and Victoire none at all. Hasn't the child come in yet?"

"There she is, I heard the door shut," answered his wife as having poured out the tea, she commenced to open the pile of epistles by her side. "Here's an invitation for you and me to dine at the Maybricks, and for Victoire to come afterwards, as they intend to get up a small dance."

"Victoire will be danced off her legs."

"Her time in London has improved her very much. She hasn't lost her freshness, and yet she is more of a woman than when she came."

"Yes, she wears—— Well, Vic!" as

the girl entered the room, fresh from an early stroll in the Square, and with a bright gladness on her face, as she greeted her uncle and aunt, which spoke wonders for London air. "More dissipation for you."

Mrs. Treherne passed her the invitation and went on examining her letters.

"Three afternoon teas," she exclaimed with a groan.

"Ah! those are your duty, I've nothing to do with them; afternoon tea doesn't agree with my nerves."

"You needn't think you are going to get off. Pass me the toast, Victoire, please. Here is a long letter from Charlie, in vile spelling, asking for half a crown, and hoping we shall go to the sea for his holidays."

"The impudence of the present generation," said Mr. Treherne, "is unsurpassable. I shall write to Dr. King, and beg him to direct Master Charlie's studies towards the law of demand and supply, his drains on my pocket are unreasonable; but what does the mother say?"

"I'll see," and Mrs. Treherne opened a long letter, written in a delicate, old-fashioned Italian hand.

"An illustration of the law you mention," she said, at last, raising her head. "Charlie wants to go to the sea-side, and the mother wants to take us there."

"To the sea-side, what do you mean?"

"Listen! 'I had a letter from Grace Horton the other day, saying her husband is ill, and has been ordered to the

German baths; so they want to let their house at Penzance, furnished, for two months. This gave me an idea, I thought it would be nice for me to take it, and have you all there, if you will come. Do think of it, my dear, the children will enjoy the sands, I shall enjoy having them and you, after my three month's solitude, and I should think both you and Victoire will be the better for sea air after your London rackettings. I am glad you tell me the child keeps well, and doesn't seem worn out; I am afraid she will find Polwhyn dull after so much dissipation.' "

Victoire looked up as if about to speak, but she did not say anything, and her aunt continued :

" ' And think it will be better to wean her gently from her gaiety, by letting

her go to Penzance before she returns home.'

"Then there are two pages about rooms, et cetera, that wouldn't interest you," said his wife.

"Anything more?"

"She sends her love to Victoire, and—ah! here is a postscript. I sent her, in my last, Mr. Lyndon's apologies and reasons for not having informed her of his profession."

"What does she say? Read it."

"'I was very much amused by the message you sent me of contrition and apology from Mr. Lyndon. Why should he beg my pardon for not having mentioned what was no business of mine? Though I own I am disappointed that the grandson of my old friends should have chosen such a life. Still it was a

very pretty and candid message he sent me, and good of him to remember an old woman—please tell him so with my regards. I am glad you like him, I thought him very charming and well-bred for a young man of the present day.’”

“I shall tell Lyndon he has evidently won the mother’s heart,” said Mr. Treherne.

“So he has mine,” answered his wife. “I think him the nicest young man I know.”

“You needn’t twit me with my age, Mrs. Treherne.”

“If you are going to talk nonsense, I shall leave you to finish your breakfast alone.”

“I apologise,” said Mr. Treherne.

“How about the Penzance scheme?”

said his wife, after a moment's pause.
"The mother writes that if we decide on going, she will take the house from next Tuesday fortnight."

"And we leave here next Thursday week," remarked Mr. Treherne, drawing a long breath of relief, which was caused by the thought of escaping from the London heat. "Well! that will give us space to set our house in order, and decide about the children."

"You seem to have determined that we are going," said his wife, laughing.
"It is very good of the mother to be bothered with us all."

"I quite agree with you. What do you say to the plan, Victoire?"

"I shall like it," Victoire answered, but the sparkle had died out of her face.

"Raymond won't be free yet, I suppose," said her aunt.

"Not till the beginning of August, and then he has to go and stay a fortnight with the Frederick Marchants."

"London in July, I pity him," said Mr. Treherne. "Shouldn't I enjoy a swim in Mount's Bay, this morning," and the speaker looked at the dusty trees of the Square, and the languid *mignionette*, in the window boxes, which the hot graceless London sun smote, even thus early, with an intolerable heat."

"If we want to do any shopping, Vic," remarked her aunt, "we must get through it this morning, the heat will be intolerable in the afternoon."

"Will it?" put in her husband who was opening his neglected letters. "I

am sorry for that, for here are tickets for Hurlingham; it's a pity you can't stand the heat."

"It may be too hot for shopping, or stupid calls, and quite cool enough for Hurlingham, and Victoire will like to go."

"No, thank you, Aunt Julia," said Victoire rather nervously. "I would rather stay at home."

Mrs. Treherne stared.

"Why, my dear child? Have you a head-ache?"

Victoire had not a head-ache, but she had very decided opinions of her own on some few subjects, among which was the cruelty of both polo and pigeon shooting. She had inwardly determined that she would never, of her own free will, witness either sport; but not wishing to say this, only answered.

"No, but won't you take Edith Rolt, auntie? I know she would like it."

"I dare say she would," said Mrs. Treherne, a little out of humour, "but I want you to go."

"I would rather not, if you don't mind."

"Are you ill?"

"No."

"Then why won't you go?"

"I don't ——" Victoire looked appealingly at her uncle, who came to her aid.

"She doesn't want to see the birds shot. Isn't that the explanation, Vic?"

"Oh! now I understand. Why didn't you say so at once, you silly child? You needn't have been afraid of wounding my feelings. I'll write round a note to Edith directly."

"Thank you, auntie," said Victoire gratefully, "you don't mind."

"Of course not, you goose; now both of you leave the room. I want to give the orders to the cook, so 'clear out,' as Aunt Chloe says."

The morning slipped away, so did the afternoon, and at half-past three Mr. and Mrs. Treherne departed for Hurlingham.

"You look pale, Vic," said her aunt, "take a siesta and be fresh for the Opera to-night. Good-bye!"

Victoire smiled and nodded; the carriage drove off, and she returned to the drawing-room.

- The day was still and hot, the drawn blinds of the open windows never swayed with a breeze, the flies basked lazily on the panes. Victoire gasped for

coolness and peace, she thought of the little wood at Polwhyn, of the clear stream gleaming and darkling in the "sunlight greenly sifted through the trees" of the mossy, ivy-clad banks, brightened with red robin and geranium, and of Frank.

Ah! of Frank. What if this London were stifling and dust-ridden as long as it held him? Here she might sometimes see him—might feel his hand pressure, and meet that beseeching gaze she understood only too well.

Away from London there was coolness and verdure, great thickets of honeysuckle and blackberry blossom, shadowy woods, infinite azure skies and blue bays, whose waves flashed with "laughter innumerable," but what were all these without him?

She had seen Frank several times in the last month, had learnt to like the slow crawling drive in the Park that had wearied her so before, till she found that she was likely to meet Mr. Lyndon there, had seen him once at the Horticultural Gardens; and beside these chance meetings, he had called at Thurloe Square three or four times, bringing as an excuse a box for the Opera or theatre.

If the Trehernes were able to accept his offering, he usually managed to join them towards the end of the evening, his own performance at the 'Areopagus' being over by ten.

These meetings were what Victoire had half unconsciously looked forward to as the brightest part of her stay in London, what she regretted now that she was leaving town, not knowing when she might

return, yet her happiness was not the calm gladness of the first days of her unconfessed love, there was a certain restlessness in it, and a bitterness which she could not remove—the knowledge that Frank was unhappy.

She longed to comfort him with an aching intensity of love, as she saw how weary with a hidden pain were his eyes, at some moments when a chance word or look seemed to have recalled some jarring memory to him; and she knew she could do nothing, that he wanted nothing except the one thing she could not give him on his own conditions, herself.

Sometimes for a moment she thought it strange, that while she would have dared the whole world for him, the mere fear of hard words from her relations, prevented Frank from declaring his love;

but she was too much in love herself to see the absurd insufficiency of the reason he had given, or the miserable coward he must be if it were the true one; her eyes were blinded, and Frank knew them to be so.

Would she see him again, Victoire wondered, before she left London? perhaps she might for half an hour or so, and after that—what after would there be for her? she could not say, "*Medea superest*" she felt herself to be a very small weak "I," poor child, longing passionately for the joy and the beauty that seemed so possible and so near her, and yet was so far removed. Ah well! she had one comfort, Frank loved her and she knew it; she wondered vaguely what she would have done if Frank had never cared for her.

"And yet there are a great many girls who love men who don't care for them," she thought. "They must be very brave to bear it, or——"

As some forgotten chord of music, the words came to her thoughts, "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be." A new heart seemed to grow up within her; let her resolve to do right, and she would not find the right too hard.

Looking round for something to divert her thoughts, she saw a volume of Shakespeare and took it up; the book opened at the scene between Orlando and Rosalind in the first act of "As You Like It," Frank had drilled her in Rosalind, and the old interest took possession of her,

"Did you call, Sir?"

Sir, you have wrestled well and overthrown
More than ——"

The door was opened and Mr. Lyndon announced.

Her face was turned away as he entered, but he saw it in the glass and the sudden, lovely gladness and surprise that illumined it; they died away as she faced him, and she looked shy and constrained as holding out her hand she stammered something about Aunt Julia's being out.

"Does that mean you won't receive me?" said Frank, as the servant vanished, "shall I go away again?"

"Oh no, I am very glad, will you have some tea?"

He watched her with a queer flicker of a smile playing round his mouth, he knew that her shyness was for him alone, that he alone could bring the colour to her cheek, the light to her eyes.

"I thought you had renounced it," he said, looking at the book she had laid down.

"It was only I was idle and wanted something to do."

"Didn't the old pleasure come back?"

"Yes," she said honestly, "but it was very foolish."

"Very," he assented, "but this is a world of foolish beings or knavish ones."

"You always speak like that."

"And you never do, Mephistopheles, the spirit of unbelief has not dwelt in and poisoned your world."

"My world! I consider myself quite a woman of the world since my visit to London."

"You haven't visited London," he answered, "what you have lived in has been

the 'season,' a place, the great mass of Londoners know nothing of."

"Has Mephistopheles no dwelling in the 'season?' "

"Oh, it's one of his favourite haunts, but he has not touched you, you believe in life still."

"I am glad I do," and her steady eyes looked gravely into his with such calm faith in good that it touched him.

"So do I, sometimes; when I am with you."

"You believe in yourself, don't you?"

If he had said what he would, it would have been, "What made you believe in me? is there some good after all in me that your clear sight saw and loved?" but the remembrance of his secret lay on him, and he asked abruptly,

"Do you leave London soon?"

"Next week."

"Next week, Polwhyn will be glad to have you again."

"Grandmamma will, I hope, but I shall only be a few days at Polwhyn, as she has just taken a furnished house at Penzance for the next two months."

"Penzance! are you going to Penzance?" and it was impossible not to observe the sudden brightening of his face and voice.

"Yes," said Victoire, rather wondering. "Do you know the place?"

"No, but I have an invitation from a friend to go yachting with him when the 'Areopagus' closes next month, and he means to cruise about that part of the coast."

"Shall you go?" she faltered.

"I meant to, a minute ago, now it rests with you."

"On me?" she tried to say more but her voice trembled.

His own was strange as he leant forward and spoke.

"Say one word, and I will go or stay."

"I thought you——" she stopped, but Frank understood.

"You thought I had forgotten, Victoire, that is not true, you know I had not."

A low sound escaped her, whether of joy or pain he could not tell, but it brought him to her side.

"Victoire, my dear, my dearest! I will say nothing you do not wish, but I cannot forget, I never shall, and you know it."

She did not move or answer, but hot as was the day, he saw a shiver pass through her.

"You sent me away from you," he said, "and I went, now——"

She raised her head and looked at him.

"Nothing is changed," she said, "nothing, and I see you were right when you said it would not be allowed; still I could bear it and wait for your sake, and if you will chance it, so will I. They may consent at last."

The words were older than those of the girl who stood with him nine months ago by the sunlit stream, but how brave and sweet they were, how full of love loyalty the tone, and the fair eyes that gazed into his. What would Frank Lyndon have given to be able to take the girl's frank

proffer and her innocent noble love ? what was worth aught to him in comparison with her ? and all he could do was to bow his head like a guilty thing, shamed to the heart at the deception he had practised on her.

" You will not," she said sadly.

" Oh ! my darling, I cannot."

She dimly felt there must be some reasons for his words of which she knew nothing, but no thought of wrong-doing on his part touched her mind.

" Give me one hope, let me know you love me," he pleaded.

" Don't ask me," she said, " don't ask. Oh ! why did you speak to-day ? we—I have been so happy, I hoped it might go on so, it was enough, and now——"

He understood.

" Then I may be your friend, Victoire,

you will let me come near you, talk to you, tell you all I can."

"Yes," she said, "only—"

"Only I must never speak of love; I accept the condition, but it is very hard."

"Is it?" she said, her lips quivering, she had never loved him as she did at that minute.

"Is it? Dear, I must speak out now since I never may again; you are all to me, Victoire, the one goodly and perfect thing the earth holds. If I must be lost, let me cling to the knowledge of you whom I have loved so well, Oh! you can never know."

She could not check him, she let him speak.

"I wish I could comfort you," she said sadly.

"You think I need comfort, then? God bless you, dear. Let me see you sometimes, not lose you quite out of my life, and if—if," he paused, "if you should hear some day something that made you hate and despise me, will you try to think you could not know all, and try to forgive, if you can?"

She stretched out her hand as though striving to give him the help he needed.

"Why do you speak like that?" she said. "You never have done anything dreadful, why should you think you ever will? But I am so much weaker than you, how could I be angry with you? who have loved——" she checked herself, then continued: "Try to be happy, dear; and Frank," she whispered lower,



CHAPTER III.

"A burning fever."

OPERA OF "RICHARD CŒUR DE LION."

BUT Nellie did not sail the next week. At the same moment as Frank left Thurloe Square, she was standing by the window of her little drawing-room, looking at the lurid edges of the clouds, while her fingers restlessly twisted her rings round and round.

"If she should discover, great God! gentle as she is, what would she think or say? Ah! well, Nellie sails next week."



"I suppose it's the thunder," she said. "One can't expect to feel well on such a day."

The heat was unbearable; she laid down on the sofa and tried to sleep, but the attempt was a failure, and the droning sound of a piano-organ grinding away at the overture to William Tell seemed to jar every nerve. She sent out her servant to send the owner away, but the notes ran on in her head, and seemed to render sleep an impossibility; so she returned to the window. It had begun to rain in great heavy drops, which as yet lay separate on the pavement; the storm had commenced, and soon there came the first gleam of lightning and crash of thunder, which, in the usual course of things, would have driven Nellie away from her post of vantage to crouch

and cower in the darkest corner she could find.

But on this day she stood by the window, watching the quick flashes of flame, the swirl of the rain against the panes, and unheeding the loud roll and crash of the thunder. What did it matter if she were killed? it would be suddenly, there would be no time for pain, and perhaps then Frank would be sorry, thought Nellie. Decidedly Miss St. Claire was very feverish to-day.

The storm passed over, leaving a pale blue sky with banks of sun-tinted clouds in the west, and a cool air, deliciously refreshing after the sultry afternoon, but Nellie felt no whit less hot than she had before. She scarcely touched her dinner, but drank a pint bottle of iced champagne, a proceeding which did not

tend to allay her fever or its attendant headache, and she felt worse than ever when she started for the theatre.

"How ill you look, dear," said one young lady, by name Miss Hatherley, as Nellie was passing behind the scenes of the 'Phœbus' to gain her dressing-room.

"Do I, dear? Oh, I'm all right, but it's been such an awful day."

"I know it has, and I feel sewn up, but you look worse," said the other girl, who was dressed for the opening farce; "can't I get you anything?"

Nellie shook her head.

"It's nothing but a headache; there's the orchestra, you'll be wanted, dear, and I must go and dress."

Miss Hatherley watched how languid

Nellie's step was as she ascended the stairs to her dressing-room, and shook her head with a nod worthy of Lord Burleigh himself.

"She looks as if she were about to faint, or do something queer," she meditated; "I'll go and see after her when this blessed piece is over."

In the meantime Nellie gained her dressing-room, but her dresser was not there, and she sat down to rest for a moment. She felt strangely confused and wretched, so confused that for a moment she wondered, with a sick-terror, if she could remember her part—so wretched that she longed for tears to come as a relief. Only one idea was clear to her, her impending voyage to America; every disagreeable connection with it rose before her ten times magni-

fied. "And I am always sea-sick," she thought, and in her excited state, the momentary misery of this last reflection was such that the next instant she burst out laughing at herself, but the laugh ended in a sob. America was so far off, she might die there and never see Frank again. What had Dick Mattocks said? that he was sure Frank would not like her leaving England; but if so, why had he not said so? why was he so proud? why had she been so foolish? but here Miss St. Claire's questioning of herself was interrupted by the entrance of her dresser.

When Miss Hatherley, acting on her resolve, ran upstairs to see how Miss St. Claire was, she found her ready dressed for her part, lying on the floor. She had fainted, and the frightened, helpless

dresser was kneeling by her side, endeavouring to restore her by feebly slapping her hands.

"Good heavens! what's the matter? has she fainted?"

"Yes, Miss, she went off all of a sudden, and I can't bring her round."

"Not likely to in that way. Here, give me the cold water, open the window, and run and get some brandy or anything. What's to be done? I hope it isn't serious. They'll ring up in ten minutes, and Miss Stainton, who has under-read her part, isn't here to-night."

But so effectual were the little actress's remedies, that in a few minutes Nellie opened her eyes.

"There be quiet, dear; you'll be

all right in a few moments. Poor dear !"

A minute's silence, then Nellie said feebly,

"Am I late ? What has happened ?"

"Nothing, dear, you were only a little faint."

"I must get ready, I shall make the stage wait."

"No, you won't, there," as Nellie struggled to her feet, "drink this."

She held out the glass the dresser had returned with, but Nellie put it away.

"Water, please," she said, but the feebleness returned, and she had to sit down.

"My dear child, do you think you can play ?" said Miss Hatherley, anxiously.

Nellie drank some water and then nodded.

"I shall pull through," she said, "though I do feel queer, you must go and dress, dear, I shall be all right in a moment."

"Here, let me give you a touch more rouge, I rubbed some off in sprinkling the water over you."

"Thank you, I don't look any the worse now."

Another five minutes and she was on the stage, brilliant in her paint and her powder, her pearls, which had the merit of not being real, and her dress of pale pink, blue, and olive brocade and satin. It was a costume piece, and she had never played better or looked prettier; but she went home to lie awake, tossing restlessly from side to side, and only fall-

ing into a fitful sleep to wake heavy, unrefreshed, and with a dull sense of pain, which was so wearying, that she at length determined to see a doctor.

The doctor gave his verdict in a very few words ; she had typhoid fever.





CHAPTER IV.

“ Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.”

BROWNING.

VICTOIRE was sitting almost at the furthest point of the Lariggan rocks at Penzance; there was a book on her lap but she was not reading, she was looking straight before her, “to where the sky and the water meet.”

It was about noon, and the tide which

had been creeping slowly out, was now low, so low that one might have waded, from where Victoire was sitting, across to St. Michael's Mount without following the bend of the bay; further away the sea was blue, shining and intense; and there was a deeper stroke away on the left beyond the Lizard, that told of rougher waters outside the bay.

Behind the girl were the town and the shore, to her right lay Newlyn and the line of coast ending in Mousehole and its isle; on the left, Marazion bare and desolate as in the days when it earned its bitter name, and the hoary tower-crowned masses of St. Michael's rocky sides rose up in front of the lovely line of coast, which faded and grew dimmer and bluer away to the Lizard Head.

How fair it all was! Victoire's eyes dwelt on the beauty of Mount's Bay as though they could never tire of those restless waves, those dim, distant headlands; she was in one of those moods when the mere beauty of the outward world seems sufficient for happiness, when one craves nothing beyond the sun's warmth, the breeze's freshness, the glad noise of rustling boughs, or tossing, or murmuring waters, or the hum of birds and insects.

But her lotus-eating calm was doomed to be of short duration, it was interrupted by, "I say, Victoire, here's such a jolly beast," and there appeared, scrambling over the rocks, a young gentleman, twelve years of age, sun-tanned, bare-footed, breathless and over-heated; to make the description more exact, it may be added

that he carried a large knife and small pail, and was arrayed in blue serge garments soaked with sea-water from the waist downwards, and a straw hat with a voluminous puggery, both dripping.

"My dear Charlie!"

"Yes, I know, don't bother, where's the jug? here he is," and Master Charles Treherne produced from his pail, what appeared a lump of brown jelly, but was in truth a sea anemone. "There!" he exclaimed, as this treasure was safely transferred to a jug by Victoire's side. "Isn't he a stunner? the Mater hasn't one like him."

"However did you manage to get like that?" said Victoire rather inelegantly, but there was still too much of the child in her for her to succeed

in looking horrified at the dripping condition of her youthful kinsman's raiment.

"Slipped into a pool after him, my eye! didn't the shrimps just scuttle. I'm off to find some more," answered Charlie, tugging viciously at the soaked masses of wet muslin surrounding his hat. "Here, Vic, can you get this beastly thing off? I can't."

"Give it to me," answered Victoire. "There," as she returned him his head-gear, denuded of its damp adornment. "Don't drown yourself as well as your hat."

Charlie vouchsafed no answer to this caution, as he took his hat and sprang away over the rock, leaving Victoire to her own devices.

There was a little rock pool at her feet

that might have been the little mermaid's garden for the wealth and beauty of colour it contained. Victoire knelt down on the rock to gaze into the limpid water and dabble her hands in it, heedless of the feverish feeling it would leave; she fished up a roseate spray of seaweed that was waving like a tiny tree under the water, but became dank and dark the moment it reached the air; she threw it back again, and pushing back the sleeve from her arm, dived her hand down to reach some mysterious treasure which shone in the deepest part of the shallow rock basin, and when brought to the light, proved only a little yellow shell.

"Does everything change when one gains it?" was her rather trite meditation. "No," she thought, as she rose and

wandered from one rock to another till she reached the end of the chain. "The shell is beautiful after all, and so is the seaweed, it is our idea of things that change, not they themselves," and here Miss Treherne rather lost herself in a maze of metaphysics.

Her attention was roused from this profitless occupation by her watching a boat rounding the point of the Battery rocks, she watched it in a half abstracted manner, wondering where it was going.

It was a pretty little boat, and there were two men in it, one of whom was rowing and the other winding up a line; as they drew nearer, Victoire saw that the first was a sailor, the second a young man in a straw hat and yachting suit of dark blue. The boat made its course

straight along the shore, passing as near as possible to the low seaweed-covered rocks that bordered the sands, then she suddenly turned round, so that the second of her occupants for the first time, caught sight of the slim figure standing at the end of the Lariggan rocks and sharply defined against the clear blue of the sky; he started and leant forward and Victoire recognised Frank.

A great wave of colour flowed all over her face, she hardly knew how to greet him, when her instinct told her what mockery any semblance of mere friendship must be between them.

But he saved her the trouble of deciding how to greet him by giving a word to the sailor rowing, which caused the boat to draw up to the rock where she was standing, and

then springing out and clasping her hand.

"Are you posing as a study for Ariadne?" he asked gaily.

"Or Dido, or any other deserted young woman," she answered laughing and her shyness gone; since he took it so naturally and easily why should not she? "but my Theseus isn't very far off, here he comes," as Charlie came towards them. "Here, Charlie, come and be introduced to Mr. Lyndon. Mr. Lyndon this is my cousin, Uncle George's eldest boy, and my especial cavalier."

"Is not your other cousin, Mr. Marchant, here?" asked Frank, when he had shaken hands with Charlie.

"Raymond? No, he is still grilling in London, don't you pity him?" said Victoire looking at him with shining eyes

and smiling lips ; she could not help being happy, the whole world was so beautiful, the day so bright.

" Immensely," said Frank much relieved at her intelligence, " I only escaped a week ago, and since then it has been ' Westward Ho ' with me."

" When did you arrive here ?"

" Last night ; my host is snoozing in his berth, the steward went down into the town to forage for provisions, and I came a-fishing, or meaning to."

" Is the yacht in the harbour then ?"

" It is for a few hours."

" Oh !" said Charlie. " Have you a yacht, Mr. Lyndon ?"

" No," said the young man, looking at Charlie with a kindly smile Victoire liked,

or rather loved, "I'm not the proprietor, but I can promise you a welcome aboard her, if you will come."

"Won't I?" said Charlie eagerly.

"Where are you staying?" inquired Frank of Victoire.

"Oh! our house is not very far; by the way, we ought to be going home, Charlie. It must be past half-past twelve."

"Will you let me come with you?" said Frank. "I want to call on Mrs. Treherne."

"If you like," Victoire answered.

He turned round and gave a few words of direction to the boatman, then he and Victoire proceeded shoreward, across the rocks, followed by Charlie, bearing his various treasures.

As they bent their steps across the rocks, Frank glanced now and then at Victoire, thinking how fair and dear she looked in her plain holland dress, such as he had first seen her in, and her shady hat only trimmed with a white muslin scarf, in which she had that morning fastened some fresh, heavy-red clove pinks; the wind had brightened her face, and ruffled her dark hair.

There had come to be mingled with Frank's love, almost against his own will, a reverence for this girl, younger and feebler than himself; this feeling had grown gradually and surely, but he had not known how strong it was till now, as he walked by her side, saying but little only looking at her with a sad and loving

wonder, why she, who might have raised him from his lower level was denied to him, why it should have been willed that he should know and love her, and yet that they should never enjoy that closer intercourse that should have allowed her influence to work.

Yet though Frank Lyndon did not recognise the fact, had it not worked, in that he appreciated her goodness, its sweetness and its worth? A year before, had he been told that he would learn to believe in a woman, as he now did in Victoire, and through her in others, he would only have smiled.

True, his love had its base and evil side, which might yet conquer; its move-

The front of the house did not look very cheerful, even when Victoire, opening a door in the wall, displayed a narrow strip of gravel bordered by evergreens, dull windows flush to the walls, and a dull hall-door; but Charlie dashed round to a small gate by the side, swung it open, and crying out, "they are in the garden," disappeared from view.

Victoire would have led the way after him, but Frank stopped her for a moment.

"How will Mrs. Treherne receive me in my character of rogue and vagabond?" he asked, half in jest and half in earnest.

"As if———" Victoire began, then coloured, and said no more, but pushed

the garden-gate open. "It is different on this side," she said.

It was indeed, the house was completely covered with creepers, trained against the walls and round the French windows that opened on a garden, not very large, but all that a garden could be in greenness and shadiness, sunlit lawn, and "full flush of fragrant blossoming," not primly disposed and sorted, but growing in a free glad luxuriance, and tended, not destroyed by art.

In the middle of the lawn was a grey stone sun-dial, overgrown and veiled by a purple passion-flower's richness of leaf and blossom; there was a great lime-tree, heavy with cloying sweetness, at one side of the lawn, and beyond

the shrubberies that surrounded the garden, were orchards and the shining sea.

Under the lime-tree sat Mrs. Treherne and her daughter-in-law, who, in order to prevent confusion, shall henceforth be known as Julia; Charlie's two little sisters were making daisy chains at their mother's feet, but at the approach of the stranger, they took flight to a summer-house, dragging with them a wax doll, whose face was blistered by her having been laid to sleep on the top of the sun-dial, as affording a cool and shady cradle.

Frank was welcomed warmly, and pressed to stay to lunch, so that he might see Mr. Treherne, who had gone for a walk to the Logan Stone.

"I never expected to see you," said old Mrs. Treherne; "though Victoire mentioned what you said about yachting."

"I told you last year you would find me a very bad shilling," said Frank. "You see I have turned up, though how long I stay is uncertain; it depends on the friend in whose yacht I am. He is a capital fellow, an old messmate of mine when I was in the Navy, but he was utterly spoilt by inheriting a fortune through an elder brother's death; he has never done anything since."

"What is his name?"

"Sir Henry Evershed."

"Sir Henry Evershed! I fancy George

knows him—met him at Ryde a year or two ago."

"It is very likely, his only object in life is yachting."

"*Chacun a son gout*," said Julia, turning to accompany Mrs. Treherne into the house, "I am never happy on the sea; but then, when whether a woman can be happy when she knows her complexion is varying between pea green and Naples yellow, is doubtful."

"Not at all doubtful, I should think," answered Frank.

"You believe all women are vain. No, don't answer, because you can't combine honesty and politeness; will you tell Victoire to come in, lunch must be nearly ready?"

Victoire had moved away to her little

cousins, who were playing on the lawn, and had knelt down to have a daisy-chain fastened round her throat; she rose as Frank approached, and lifted in her arms the younger child, who clung round her neck.

"Isn't she too heavy for you?" said Frank.

"Oh no! I often carry her, don't I, Gertie?"

Gertie, aged two, a small thing with wide blue eyes, hair that glistened golden in the sun, and vermeil and white skin, nodded and turned round from her employment of demolishing the flowers in her cousin's hat, to look at the stranger with that shyly confident gaze which is so winning. Her inspection seemed to satisfy her, for she stretched out one

ohubby hand to Frank with the words
"Dandy tair."

"No, Gertie, don't teaze Mr. Lyndon."

"No;" repeated Gertie, with a solemn look at her cousin.

"You must think I am very easily teased," answered Frank, who always gave out he hated children, "what is it, Gertie?"

"Dandy tair," again said Miss Gertie, with the air of a duchess ordering her carriage.

A dim remembrance of the meaning of the words, derived from his own childhood, crossed Frank's mind, and he answered.

"All right, Gertie, if your cousin will."

"She will," answered Gertie, confidently, "or me ty."

"Please avert such a catastrophe," said Mr. Lyndon, stretching out his hands, and grasping Victoire's yielding ones in his firm hold, so that Miss Gertie was seated triumphant in her dandy chair, one of her fat arms round the neck of each of her bearers.

So they moved to the house together, each looking at the child, each feeling the other's touch through their whole being. They let Gertie down at the drawing-room window, but for a moment Frank still held Victoire's hands imprisoned in his; for a moment her eyes met his fully.

"I am so glad to be here," he said impulsively, almost involuntarily.

She said nothing, only drew her hands away, and then saying something about getting ready for lunch, left the room and sought her own.

She knew, and the knowledge was bitter to a girl proud of her honour and honesty, that she had allowed herself, how she could hardly tell, to drift into a secret understanding with Frank; and yet what could she do now? It was her fault that he had called on them in London; had followed them to Penzance.

"I have been so weak," she thought, "and yet I never meant to deceive them, as I have; for he knows I love him and no one else does. I can't help it now, I don't know that I would if I could. He is so unhappy; I am glad if I can make

him happy for a moment, and myself too.
I will not let it go further than it has ;
but, oh ! what would life be without
him ?"






CHAPTER V.

“ Ask me no more, my fate and thine are sealed.
I strove against the stream, and all in vain,
Let the great river take me to thee again ;
No more, dear love, for at a touch I yield.”

TENNYSON.

“ OME, Evershed, it's time to
start for the harbour.”

“ Can't you let a fellow
finish his breakfast in peace, this coffee's
vile, not fit to drink.”

Frank shrugged his shoulders. “ If

you want to keep people waiting, well and good, but considering your energetic assurances to Mrs. Treherne ——"

Sir Henry Evershed sipped his coffee tranquilly, and gazed at his friend.

"All right, don't put yourself out; but I must say, Lyndon, that for you, the most unpunctual fellow in the world, to be in this state of anxiety lest we should be late ——"

"Oh! it's very well for you to chaff," replied Mr. Lyndon moodily. "But it isn't quite the thing to keep people cooling their heels on the quay, waiting for us."

"I wish I could cool my heels," rejoined his friend, "or any part of me; my prophetic soul tells me it's going to be a blazer to-day."

The two men sauntered up to the deck, and leant over the gunwale, gazing at the shore; the yacht was anchored off Newlyn, where the fishing boats were in, and the beach covered with silvery heaps of fish, round which were gathered the fishermen and their wives and children, sorting and packing the night's spoil; the wooded crag of Tolcarn rose above the village, green in its summer livery, and below was the foaming watermill, and the little church, and the road that led down by the river to the sea. The whole scene was bright and hardly English in its character, with the lapis lazuli sea, the black fishing boats, with their warm brown sails furled, the shining heaps of fish, and the moving figures on the beach, brightened by scarlet

flashes of women's kerchiefs or petticoats.

"Pretty," said Sir Henry laconically. "I like this place; you're not tired of it, are you, Lyndon?"

"Does that mean you want to leave it," said Frank.

"No, if you're not tired of it; I'm not, though we've been here a week. I suppose we had better be off now, the boat's ready."

The two men were soon being pulled round to Penzance harbour; the day was fine with a bright sun and fresh breeze, the very day for a pic-nic, and it was a pic-nic they were engaged to, a joint affair, arranged by the Trehernes, and a branch stem of the obnoxious family of Pentreath mentioned at the beginning

of this tale, the destination of the party being St. Michael's Mount.

There was a gay group waiting on the quay as Frank had foretold, George Treherne and his wife, accompanied by Victoire and Charlie, were standing talking to the Pentreaths.

There were three Miss Pentreaths, pretty girls with small talk at will on any subject, well dressed, expensively educated and amply dowered, thanks to objectionable mills and tan-pits; there was nothing to find fault with in them, and yet Frank, glancing at them, felt the difference between them and Victoire.

"Nice girls," said Sir Henry as the boat neared the quay. "I don't mind a pic-nic when the women are pretty;

but they can't hold a candle to Miss Treherne; they rather over do it, she doesn't."

"What do you mean?"

"Everything, dress and talk, and you know what I mean. They are too well got up, that's just the difference between a thorough woman and one that isn't so."

Frank thought of Clerimont's song of the "Sweet Neglect."

"I don't see," continued his friend, "how a fellow could stand life with a woman who wasn't a lady in every ——. I beg your pardon, old fellow," burst out Sir Henry, with wonderful want of tact, as he saw Frank's face grow dark.

"What for?" said Frank, "you didn't

mean it, for goodness sake let sleeping dogs lie."

Sir Henry was glad to take his friend's advice, and to turn the conversation back to its former channel. Frank, when "the dark mood" was on him, was not a pleasant companion.

"Now the Pentreath girls are nice," said the Baronet, "but no one could think of putting them into a poem, or a picture, or anything of that kind, while there's something about Miss Treherne that isn't just like all other girls. Hallo! here we are."

Frank was not vexed at his friend's praise of Victoire, he knew both the girl and Sir Henry too well to be so, but he was neither cheerful nor conversational when he discovered that Victoire was

being monopolized by a male scion of the Pentreaths, and that her hand-touch and a swift gleam of welcome from her eyes was all he could see of her till they reached the Mount.

He waited, when they landed on the tiny quay at St. Aubyn, to hand her out of the boat, and as the party broke up into twos and threes, as they wandered up the ascent to the castle, he took possession of her.

The steep path between thickets and brushwood grew more precipitous every moment, till it became really toilsome, making Frank exclaim,

"By Jove! this is no joke."

"You admit it?" said Victoire, "you, who tried to make poor grandmamma come with us."

"I confess my fault."

"Well, your penance is that we are not near the top yet."

"It is not a hard penance to bear," he said, as they came to a resting-place where the path turned suddenly round, and a bed of forget-me-nots smiled up bluely at them from the shade.

Victoire knew what he meant, knew that she would have been glad had the path been ten times longer, but she said nothing.

On again; they had fallen behind the others, whom the winding-path concealed from their view; as the road became yet steeper Frank offered his arm, Victoire needed no help and would have refused it.

"Do," he said, "you had better."

She obeyed him, the mere semblance of dependence on him was strangely, dangerously sweet, and the remaining distance to the castle door seemed shorter to her than it ever had done before.

"Are we to explore the castle after this terrible climb?" he asked, as they reached the castle and turned to enjoy the fresh cool breeze.

"No," she answered, "you shall be rested and refreshed first. I wonder where the others are, they must have gone round to the other side. How delicious the wind is here!"

Frank removed his hat that he might the better enjoy it, and they stood side by side looking at the glorious steep, the cliff that fell away a few feet from where

they stood, the mighty, weather-stained crags, partly hidden by the masses of foliage which clothed part of their sides, and the little fishing village nestling at the foot of the Mount so far beneath their feet.

"What a fall it would be," said Frank, looking at the cliff.

"And yet men risk it every day," she answered. "You know St. Michael's chair?"

"Ah! where is that? it is one of the things I want to see."

"Look up there," and she pointed to the summit of the grey tower, which rose above their heads. "Do you see it?"

"What! those three little bits of stone that jut out from the battlement into the air?"

"Yes; just see what they overhang! the tower and that awful precipice below, just think if——" and Victoire gave an involuntary shudder. "And yet people will get into it, girls too. I suppose I am horribly cowardly, but I never mustered up courage when I was here years ago, and I can't now, though all the Pentreath girls have been in it."

"You have been here before, then?"

"When I was quite a child: Raymond and his friend, Mr. Gordon, were with us, and they sat in the chair together, one on the other's lap. It was like a nightmare to see them, the getting into the chair is sickening to watch, it seems as if it *must* go; but the getting out is worse."

"I suppose it is safer than it looks."

"I don't know, it always frightens me. Mr. Lyndon," she said suddenly, "don't get into it, please."

"It might be rather a good way of putting an end to myself. No, don't look like that," he added quickly, "I didn't mean it, and life is worth living. Any how," he added, with a change of tone, and speaking lightly, "I'm too fond of my own neck to risk it, and a fall from that tower isn't an euthanasia to be coveted. I had no idea from the land what a height this Mount was."

"Then you hadn't studied your guide book," said Victoire, speaking at random. "You might have learnt the exact number of feet from that."

Frank muttered something that did not sound like a benison on the useful manual in question.

"Can you fancy a man," said Victoire, who seemed rather to incline to horrors this morning, "riding on horseback up the path by which we have come, and only dismounting at the castle door, then riding down again?"

"My imagination won't go so far," said Frank, "and I am quite sure that no man's horse ever could."

"My grandfather did it when he was a young man," said Victoire; "he and a friend had a wager, one was to ride from Marazion, when the tide was low, up the Mount, knock on horseback at the castle door and then ride down again, and the other was

to ride round the Cape of the Land's End."

"Did both commit suicide? or did their friends lock them up as lunatics?"

"No, grandpapa accomplished his part, he rode up here and down again in safety, though how, I don't know."

"In the middle ages they would have considered he had made a compact with a certain old gentleman; but how about his friend? did he come off as well?"

"No, he rode safely round the Land's End, but just as he was returning over the neck of land with cliffs on either side, his horse's foot slipped on the dry, smooth turf."

"The end of both was pieces, I suppose?"

"The poor horse clung on to the side of the cliff with his four hoofs. Think what it must have been; I never read the 'Duchess May,' without thinking of it."

"That poem we read last year, I remember something about a horse, what was it?"

Victoire had known the poem by conning it over many times last winter, she repeated the lines now,

"'And a look of human woe from his staring eyes
did go,
And a sharp cry uttered he, as in foretold agony
Of the headlong death below,'

the rider escaped by scrambling over the horse's head and saved himself, the dear horse fell."

"That's the way things now seem to be managed in this world," said Frank.

"Perhaps it was better for the horse—and the man," she answered.

"For the man, but how for the horse?"

"I don't know," she said vaguely. "I feel it must have been right or it wouldn't have happened."

She had the innocent assured belief of a child, the belief of one who has known little but happiness. It was not the strong faith, tried by fire, of one who has questioned and doubted, proved and held fast the trust through the knowledge of earth's infinite woe and gladness, sin and goodness, that the means and the end are with God and that all will be well ;

but such as her simple trust was, it roused reverence, perhaps even envy, in Frank.

He did not try to shake it by doubt or argument, or even try to ascertain her views as to the future of the unfortunate horse, or hint that man's rashness or wickedness might cog the world's wheels, as they seemed to have done in the present instance. She had seen so little of the world, how could she be expected to see things from a different point of view to that of her own life?

The appearance of Master Charlie rushing round from the other side of the castle interrupted their conversation.

"I say, Vic!" exclaimed that young

gentleman, rather breathlessly. "They are spreading the grub and want you to help."

It was a very merry lunch ; the lobsters were fresh, the salad crisp, the champagne and claret cup both good, and the salt, pepper and sugar contented with the places to which they were called. Then came the pleasantest time of a sea-side picnic, that post prandial half hour, when people rested lazily on the grey green turf, under the shadow of the rocks, enjoying the sun's warmth, the breeze's freshness and the glory of the sky and sea, and beguiling the time with pleasant, disjointed chat, and on the men's part, with tobacco.

An adjournment to the castle was at last proposed, Mr. Treherne murmured

something about cruelty to animals, and his sympathy with the lotus eaters. Sir Henry seconded him by saying that they were very comfortable as they were, why should they move ?

"I daresay," said Julia Treherne, severely. "No, Sir Henry, you and Mr. Lyndon came here to see the castle, and see it you shall."

"Are we all to go over it?" inquired her husband, meekly. "Mayn't we beg off who know every crack in the thirteenth century chairs and could prompt the housekeeper if she faltered in her description?"

"Certainly not," was all his tyrant vouchsafed, and Mr. Treherne, contenting himself with one more grumble offered his hand to the eldest Miss Pentreath, to aid

her in her struggle up the slippery ascent.

The castle was viewed in every part, from the long hall, once the refectory of the monks, to the drawing-room, where the carved frieze over the fire-place and the medieval ceiling contrast so strangely with the modern air of comfort, and the velvet tables on which the Cornhill and Punch repose; and from thence to the chapel, with the fair terrace opening therefrom, and overlooking the dizzy heights, and the little dungeon led down to by a flight of steps from the chapel.

"And now for the tower," said Miss Pentreath, as they emerged from the dungeon, blinking like so many owls.

"No, that I do hold myself exempt

from," said Mr. Treherne, "I have no faith in St. Michael's chair; before my wife was born I sat in it and *cui bono?*"

Half the party remained in the chapel, while the others toiled up the narrow corkscrew staircase of the tower.

As Victoire reached the top, she turned round and found Frank close behind her.

"I know I am very foolish," she said, trying to laugh, but with an agony of earnestness in her eyes. "But don't get into St. Michael's chair."

"Of course I won't if you don't wish it, but it isn't really dangerous; see, Evershed is in it, already."

Sir Henry had stepped from the raised part of the tower leads on to the battle-

ment, had let himself down and was sitting, supported only by those three apparently insecure fragments of stone, which had once formed part of the framework of the beacon-lantern to warn sailors from the Mount. The young man was sitting in mid air, with the horrible fate of that blank depth below his feet; he seemed "an inch from death's black fingers," but the danger was far less than it appeared, and when Sir Henry was safely out of his seat, Charlie and one or two of the stray men, who always gather at a picnic, took possession of the chair by turns.

"Will you try, Miss Treherne?" said young Pentreath to Victoire.

Victoire shook her head.

"I'm afraid," she said laughing.

"It is the first time that ever I heard that breaking of *necks* was sport for ladies," quoted Frank moodily.

"Then you are behind the age, my dear fellow," said Sir Henry, "look at the crowds who go to see Zazel or Blondin."

"That's not their own neck," said Frank; remembering how Victoire had refused one day in town to go and see a poor girl risk her life for the public amusement, he added: "There are some women who don't care for horrors like that, but as a whole I suspect human nature doesn't change much, and that we are of a piece with the Roman men and women who watched gladiators. I believe if a gymnast were to announce that he would dive from the top of this

tower, half England would come down by excursion train to see it."

"Oh! Mr. Lyndon," exclaimed one of the Pentreaths. "How can you say such a thing?"

"Why not?" said Frank. "You go to see Zazel."

"Oh! but that's different."

"This would be much more exciting," he said. "Fancy the large posters, 'Gigantic Sensation! Certain Death!'" a queer smile flitted across his face as he saw the young lady's puzzled and rather nonplussed expression.

"I suppose we can come down again now," said Sir Henry, and the party began to make their rather tedious descent of the winding stairs.

Victoire was the last to descend except

Frank, and when she was at the foot of the stairs, it struck her that Mr. Lyndon was not following her; she halted for a moment, then a thought flashed on her, he had stayed behind to get into that horrible chair.

The others had all reached the chapel below, she could hear their laugh and talk; for one instant she stood as though paralysed, then sick with fear sped up the twisting stairs; she gained the battlement to find her fears realized, Frank was in the chair and just preparing to get out.

Her step was so light he had not heard it, and his back being turned he did not see her. She knew a start might cost him his life, so she spoke no word, gave no sign, but stood white and

breathless, her large eyes fixed, till suddenly life seemed to leave her in utter horror as in Frank's turning round, his foot slipped, his eyes met hers, and——

She knew no more till she found Frank by her, his arms round her, the feeling as of his lips lingering on her brow.

"Victoire, my darling, my dearest, don't be frightened! I am safe. Oh! my love, I am not worthy——"

She drew a long shivering breath but did not move.

"How could you? what should I have done if——?" she hardly knew what she said in the sudden shock, but with a quick movement he caught her to him.

"Do you still love me so? am I still needful to you, and will you yet send me away? O! my child, what use is it? our love is the same if we speak of it or not, why will you make us both wretched by this silence?"

"No," she said vaguely, "it is no use, I am very tired—"

"Of this struggle, then end it, dear; I do not ask much, only that you will let me tell you what you are to me, let me know of that dear love I have never deserved."

He drew her closer to him and she yielded in silence to his kiss, the gladness of this moment overcoming all else in her heart.

"As you will," she said at last.

He had conquered, he kissed her lips,

he felt how her hands still trembled, and they stood for one moment, her head resting on his shoulder, and her heart content with that passionate peace she had craved so hungrily for ever since that September evening, when she had watched him striding down the Polwhyn road in the falling twilight away from her, she had then feared, away from her life.

Regret might come later, but this moment was stainless and perfect in its sweetness, her lover was to her the one supreme fact of the world, his joy, his wish outweighing all else.

And what were Frank's feelings. He too left the past and future unthought of; sufficient to the day was the good thereof, at another time he felt remorse

at having deceived this girl, whose passionate love, whose perfect faith in him taught her that he could do no wrong; but now, with those lovely eyes meeting his, that small hand resting in his clasp, he could feel only gladness at having conquered the fine instinct of openness, that had denied him the assurance of her love, unless those to whom she was dear should also know of it. Neither at this minute did he think of the chances that his secret might be discovered, and all Victoire's love turn to bitterness and scorn, if not to hate.

"An hour's perfection can't recur;" in another minute they were down in the chapel with the rest of the party, and for the rest of the afternoon, they saw little of each other, as Frank was always care-

ful to avoid any suspicion of his feeling for Victoire, by any but the most ordinary courtesy towards her.

When the picnic party were preparing to leave the Mount, Mrs. Pentreath proposed that they should go to her house to finish the evening.

"Oh, yes, do!" said Miss Pentreath, eagerly, "and I'll send notes to ask the Lakes and Thorntons to come in this evening, so that we can get up a dance; you will come won't you, Mrs. Treherne?"

"I hardly know," said Julia; "I should like it very much, but my mother has been left alone so often of late. What do you say, George?"

"That I must go home straight, as I have some business letters to write; but

I don't see why you and Vic should not stay, Charlie and I will keep the mother company."

"Then we shall be very glad to," said Mrs. Treherne to Mrs. Pentreath; "but don't you think we had better be getting down to the boats?"

Victoire never forgot that journey homeward, across the tranquil waters, crimsoned by the sunset, purple in the distance, where crept the shadow of the coming night, and one star shone in the depths of the soft sky. The oars rose and fell with their measured splash in the languid waters, and mingled their sounds with the party's gay talk.

Frank, looking across to where she sat, wondered at the rapt gaze of her eyes,

fixed on the glowing western clouds, and
the sun's molten fire just sinking into
the clear sea beyond the bay.





CHAPTER VI.

“ Oh ! we’re sunk enough here, God knows !
But not quite so sunk that moments
Sure tho’ seldom are denied us,
When the spirit’s true endowments
Stand out plainly from its false ones,
And apprise it if pursuing
Or the right way or the wrong way,
To its triumph or undoing.”

BROWNING.—“ CHRISTINA.”

THE impromptu party at the Pen-
treaths was nearly at an end,
a waltz was just over, and most
of the guests had strayed into the cool

garden, or sought the dining-room for claret-cup.

Victoire and Frank were standing on the lawn under the shade of a gum cistus, which had strewn the ground beneath with its fragile blossoms; the soft-scented night air, the silent, starry sky stilled and tranquillized the girl, and made her able to realize that she had yielded to the power she had so long struggled to resist.

Yet she would not have recalled her words of to-day, and have lost what she found so exquisite, the feeling of freedom from that closely guarded reserve she had tried to practise with Frank, the new, strange sense of resting on his love.

"Frank," she said, at last, raising her

face, and his name came so lingeringly and tenderly from her lips, as to make him start for a moment. Why should the memory come across his mind of how dear his name had sounded to him eight years ago, from the lips of his newly married wife?

He crushed the remembrance, and with it the agony of self-loathing and shame that seemed ever ready to rise up in his heart, drowning and choking even love's joy in its bitter waters, and turned to Victoire.

"What is it, my darling?" he said, drawing her hand between his two and looking at her, so that Victoire thought she had never fully realized the beauty of his face, had not known how those dark eyes could melt into intensest soft-

ness under their thick black fringes, how sweet was the curve of the melancholy lips, how fair the forehead with its level brows and delicate temples, and the waving sweep of dark brown hair above. If the face had seemed a revelation of unknown things to her when she had first seen it in the wood a year ago, what was it to her now ?

"What made you care for me?" she said, at last.

"You asked me that once before," he said. "I will not flatter you, God knows my love is no honour."

He had begun in jest, and ended in earnest ; in earnest she answered him.

"It is the crown of my life."

"A poor one," he answered bitterly ;
"I can never give you what you have

given me, your heart's first freshness and love."

She laughed a little low laugh of content.

"I learnt out of Shakespeare long ago, that I musn't expect to be loved first. But where do men's first loves go to? are they dreams, spirited away?"

"No;" he answered, "they are no dreams, if the love is one. You don't wish to have had my first love, Victoire, then?"

"I am content," she said, "if you give me the last—and best," she added, after a moment's hesitation, and there was something in her voice which made him say,

"You don't mean you are jealous, sweetheart!"

She smiled.

"Only a little; it is so strange that you should care for me, when I think of the beautiful women—"

"Who have sighed at my feet; are you going to make me a hero of romance?"

"No, whom you have seen and acted with."

Her hand was resting on the rail of a garden-seat, Frank's closed on it, and drew her to him.

"Foolish child!" he said, tenderly. "If you could only see one rehearsal, and find how the love-making is a matter of etiquette and paces, thus far and no farther, with me, at least. Haven't you heard again and again what a cold lover I am? And as for beauty, I have made

it a rule never to praise you, but if you saw your face as I do."

"How is that?" she said.

"A lamp, through which I see your thoughts. Victoire, do you remember the little nosegay of heartsease you gave me that morning we walked together to Alvern farm? It was a type of what you have been to me, my sweetest thought, my heart's ease.

In after years Victoire could not smell myrtle without remembering the bitter sweet aromatic fragrance which was borne to them that night from the pale blossomed shrubs near, could not hear the faint night rustle of the sleeping birds among the boughs, or the low roll and splash of the distant sea, without their bringing back the starlit garden, the dark,

hushed trees, and with them, Frank's voice, Frank's face, as she heard and saw them that August night under the silent sky.

"I think those flowers deserved their other name," said the girl, with a little quiver in her voice. "Love in idleness, they have blinded your sight."

"No, they have restored it, dear; I have told you before what you have done for me, how you have taught me to feel what I thought was long since dead for me, not 'the glory in the grass, the splendour in the flower,' those have gone for ever, but the *ewig weibliche*, the Eternal womanhood, and that to which it may raise us, purer aspirations, nobler longing than have been mine for many a year. Oh, my darling! if this were all

you had given me, without the sweet treasure of your love, what should I not owe you still?"

His voice trembled as he spoke, his whole soul was in his words, words such as Frank Lyndon in his cooler moments would have smiled at the idea of his using, even if he had felt them, as a year ago he would have laughed at the idea of his feeling, far less giving utterance to such *tête montée* expressions.

Strange inconsistency, that the baser side of the very love which had raised him in thought, nay, in his ordinary life, out of the *bornée* existence which had been his, should have tempted him to sin so grievously against her, and against his own honour.

"Miss Treherne," said one of the Pen-treaths, coming across the lawn to where they stood, "your aunt says she must go; we begged her to stay a little longer, but she is inflexible."

The young lady darted off again, and Frank and Victoire moved from under the shadow of the gum cistus and myrtles towards the house.

"You will meet me on the beach to-morrow?" he said, in a low voice, "on the Lariggan rocks at eleven. I shall want to see your face to be sure it is not all a dream, that you really let me tell you I love you."

"Yes," she said, a shadow of sadness in her voice. "But how is it different really from yesterday? we must still wait and wait. Frank, what will be the end?"

"God knows!" he said, surprised into truth, by having the question he had all along resolutely avoided put suddenly before him.

Mrs. Treherne came up in search of Victoire, and nothing more passed between the girl and Frank than a good-night; but when she and her aunt were gone, he stayed where he parted from them, his brows drawn down, his lips compressed, a strange trouble on his face.

Victoire's last words had seemed to make a veil fall from his eyes, so that he saw for the first time the full extent of his villainy.

For villainy it was, to win a girl's love as he had won Victoire's, and be able to give her nothing in return, not

even a word of tenderness it would not shame her to remember, if she ever learnt all. Small excuse was it in his own eyes, that he never wished to ruin her purity, only to spoil the gladness of her girlhood, and let her waste all the freshness of her woman's power of passionate tenderness and truth on a fruitless love; to steel her heart against affection better worth than his.

He turned into the house; one of the Miss Pentreath's was singing, he did not know the air or recognise the words, there was already an attendant squire to turn over her leaves, so Mr. Lyndon took a seat by a table on which there were some books; he took one up to glance at, and was turning over the pages, when his eyes were arrested by a passage.

"Honour—and we say this with grief—is a law men made for men, and women have not been at all consulted in the enactment. There are few, very few, who will sacrifice all things for a woman, when that woman will be theirs without any sacrifice at all."

Thank God that did not apply to him or her; he was no seducer, but if he had been, Victoire would still have been safe in her fearless and trusting innocence, the very innocence which had granted his imploring prayer that he might speak of his love; and yet, the sentence he had read had sufficient potential, if not actual, truth, as applied to him, to pierce him to the heart.

By a strange coincidence the last words of Miss Pentreath's song rang out clearly into the room,

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more."

Frank rose and reached the window when the song was ended; he gasped as he felt the cool night air after the heated room, but the gasp was almost a sob.

"Aren't you going to turn in, Lyndon?" said Sir Henry, an hour later, when they had returned to the yacht.

"Not just yet, I couldn't sleep, I've such a confounded headache, and the sea-breeze may do it good."

"It's all that sweet champagne at the Pentreaths," rejoined his friend. "Why will people give you bad champagne while bitter ale is cheaper? Well, good-night to you."

"Good-night."

"Damn the fellow!" was Sir Henry's interjection, as after half an hour's slumber he awoke with a jerk, probably caused by the obnoxious champagne, to hear Frank's 'measured step still sounding up and down the deck overhead, "I do believe he has a tile loose somewhere."





CHAPTER VII.

“ Though those that are betrayed
Do feel the treason sharply, yet the traitor
Stands in worse case of woe.”

CYMBELINE.

UP and down, up and down the deck, till the white stars grew faint, and the sky transparent with the strange light which foreruns summer dawn.

It was very strange, Frank Lyndon had done his best to quench the murmur-

ings of honour, and pity, and love, which his better self had whispered to him, and yet at this hour that better self rose up stronger and more earnest than it had ever been, to wrestle with his worse and weaker nature, bidding him renounce what he had won to-day or be degraded for ever.

Though he had sinned heavily, there was still one course open to him by which he might partly redeem the past, but at what a price! It was not only his own chance of joy, such brief, feverish joy embittered by remorse as might yet be his that this course would destroy, it would break the heart of the young girl who was dearer to him than aught on earth, how dear he had not known till now, as he realized how blank and

dreary life would be to him without her.

Redeem the past! he never could redeem it, he could never make amends to Victoire for having gained her love; it was a noble reparation truly, this only one which was in his power—to confess the secret which would crush her under a weight of anguish and shame; but even this would scarcely repair the harm he had wrought her in awakening her heart, knowing that he could not repay her tenderness without guilt, the guilt of a most base treachery, such as had been his for the last year.

As he paced the deck, Victoire's face rose before him as he had seen it at different times that day, as his eyes had met it in that horrible moment when his

foot slipped and death seemed so near him, and Victoire, pale with an agony of terror, was all he saw; as he had watched it in the boat, gazing across the crimson waters to the setting sun, and full of a strange and wistful yearning after something unknown, a desire even his love did not satisfy; as it had been raised to him this evening in the moonlight, transfused with her love happiness, her eyes full of the passion she herself hardly understood.

That dear face! was he to sadden its eyes and dim that brightness which always rested on it in his presence? must he give up ever seeing it again, ever learning the sweetness and graciousness of the nature which opened itself so frankly, yet so modestly, under the in-

fluence of his caressing words, his foolish, fond questionings of her love? No; he could not do it.

Anything but this, he could not cut off his right hand, his love for Victoire, Victoire's love for him, and cast it from him; and yet he knew he could never enter into life, the new life she had made him long for—an existence that should be manly and earnest—with this terrible weight of deceit weighing it down.

Would it were done, that Victoire's burst of agony at his selfish cruelty, her wrath, or scorn, or worst of all, her coldness were faced and past, and he left to bear the burden which must be his.

That was the worst, the burden could not be his alone, she must bear the

heaviest part, and he who had loved her, and yet laid this sorrow on her would be powerless to help the wrong he had done.

He thought of what she had told him this afternoon, of how barren and sad the longing for him had made the winter to her, and pictured to himself how winter and summer would pass by her at Polwhyn; how she would move about the old house and the garden where he and she had wandered together, with the light vanished from her eyes, the life from her step; and how perhaps when her grief for the love that was lost grew duller, and her scorn and anger against the lover who had deceived her keener, she might fashion a new love and life for herself, and marry—perhaps that prig of a cousin.

Marry Raymond Marchant! involuntarily, Frank clenched his fist with a sudden fierceness at the idea of Victoire's ever looking into another man's eyes as she had looked into his, ever resting on another man's arms, or yielding her lips to another man's kiss, and yet why should she not? why should his fault condemn her to a loveless life?

It was for her to choose, God help him to do the right, and render to her such pitiful, unjust justice as was still in his power.

"My poor love!" he murmured. "My poor, sweet love!"

He leant over the yacht's side and gazed dreamily at the rippling water in which the steadfast stars were mirrored, shining unmoved beneath the moving

wavelets. Two old lines were running in his head as to a tune,

"Beauty, strength, youth are flowers, but fading
seen ;
Duty, faith, love are roots and evergreen."

It was better so, he would nerve himself to it; when they met later in the day that was now begun, he would tell her all.

He was no earnest believer, the life he had led was not one to encourage a pure or lofty faith, but now in that hour of resolve for good, belief in the Supreme Good flowed back to him in a mighty tide, and he bowed his head in a crushed cry of agony, a suppliant prayer, "God help her and forgive me."

His love, his darling ! how should he

meet her? he looked away to where the incoming tide was fast covering the black outline of the Lariggan rocks. When he and Victoire should stand together on those rocks some hours later, how would they part?

His head sank on his hands as he sat by the gunwale in a listless stupor of sorrow; the struggle had been sharp, how sharp none but himself could ever know, and sleep at last came to him, a short sleep.

When he woke again, the sun was rising behind the Lizard Head, touching every wave into rose, flooding the east with a blinding glory of light. A freshening breeze had arisen, the wave crests were white and dancing, and the gulls swooped languidly over them in the

brightening air ; the morning was fresh with that freshness only known when the sea and the dawn meet, but the early sunbeams showed Frank's face tired and sad, and he, himself, felt not only mentally, but physically jaded and weary.

An early swim did him good, he forgot to think for a few minutes in the pleasure of fighting those leaping green waves, and when he had returned again to the yacht, had dressed, and was leaning back in a cane chair on deck, he dropped off into a sleep which lasted till Sir Henry came up from the cabin with a tremendous appetite for both breakfast and talk.

"When do you think of going on to Scilly, Evershed?" Lyndon asked at

last, when they had nearly finished breakfast, and Sir Henry had exhausted almost every subject of talk that occurred to him, without receiving more from his friend in reply than an abstracted, "yes," or "no."

"Oh! I don't know, you said yesterday you were not tired of this place; I'm beginning to think I've had nearly enough of it, that picnic yesterday was the third we have been to in five days."

Now Frank had intended, if he found his friend determined on staying at Penzance, to invent some excuse of business in London, as a reason for leaving him, but as it was, he only replied.

"Then why not go on at once to

Scilly, as you intended; I think, as you say, we have had enough of Penzance."

"All right, but we must call on your friends, the Trehernes, and those other people to say good-bye this afternoon."

"Very well. Are you going on shore this morning?"

"No, are you?"

"I rather want to get one of those serpentine tazzae," said Frank seizing the first excuse that occurred to him.

Sir Henry raised his eyebrows.

"Can't say I admire your taste; of all the ugly things I ever saw, they are the ugliest, and if you only want it as a memento of the place, one of those white

mugs with "a present from Penzance" on it, would do just as well and come a good deal cheaper."





CHAPTER VIII.

“ Oh ! my sweet,
I have come here to take farewell of life,
That I have lived and love that I have served.”

CHASTELARD.

HALF past ten ! Victoire came in through the window from the garden, where she had been gathering great masses of roses for her aunt to arrange for the drawing-room's adornment ; with a last handful of crimson and creamy blooms, and two

golden 'Maréchal Niel' tea-roses; which last, having given the others to her aunt, she pinned in a small black hat lying on the table.

"May I go down to the shore now, grandmamma?" she said, trying to make her voice appear unconcerned.

"If you like, dear, but isn't it rather hot? Your aunt doesn't want you, I suppose?"

"Oh no," said Julia, who was bending over the flowers, "Vic has earned her liberty, she took Charlie's Latin this morning before breakfast, and I heard her practising at some unearthly hour."

"So did I," said Mrs. Treherne, "but it didn't seem to me very regular practice, Victoire, you only went on

playing Chopin at your own sweet will."

Victoire knew that, knew she had gone to the piano to find relief for the ecstasy and impatience of her heart in that wayward, troubled, passionate music; but she did not answer, only waited till her grandmother spoke again.

"Run along, child, then. It seems rather a pity though, to have put on that pretty dress for the shore," she added, as Victoire donned her black hat with its yellow adornment.

Victoire blushed, her dress was one of the prettiest she had, though very simple, a fresh white cambric, with pale yellow bows like spring butterflies, and she knew she had put it on to please Frank's eyes.

"It will wash, grandmamma," she said hurriedly, "and I won't hurt it. Good-bye."

She leant over Mrs. Treherne and gave her a little kiss, then took her way through the garden.

She stopped to gather two or three dark purple heartsease, and placed them in her belt, smiling at the remembrance of those other pansies Frank had reminded her of the night before.

If she were indeed so sweet a thought to him, as he had said, the world could hold nothing better for her than to be his heartsease, she thought to herself, as she walked quickly down the Alexandra Road towards the sea.

Would she still think so, when the dalliance and joyaunce of love should

have vanished, and she have no heart for the pretty conceit the purple flowers had suggested.

She reached the esplanade, but she could not see Frank anywhere along the shore, so made her way towards the Lariggan rocks; there she saw him, standing some way off, nearly at the end of them, and with his face turned away from where she stood.

He did not perceive her till she had nearly reached him, as he did, her foot slipped on the smooth seaweed, and she would have fallen, had he not sprung forward and caught her.

He held her for one moment, clasping her with an involuntary closeness.

"You are not hurt?" he asked tenderly and anxiously.

"You saved me," she said, and raised her eyes to his face, something she saw therein startled her and made her exclaim, "Are you well?"

"Why?"

"You look so pale," and a sudden chill of disappointment struck through her; he had not smiled when they met, he did not seem glad to see her.

"I am quite well," he answered quietly, almost coldly, "but—"

He paused for a moment, then continued in the same tone.

"Victoire, I have something I must tell you, something you should have known long ago. Will you listen?"

The change in his manner struck the girl, half with fear, half with wonder; she looked again at his face with a

troubled, wistful glance, which pained him sorely.

"I know what you mean," he said, more in his old manner, though his voice was husky and strange, "but you will understand all very soon, I will tell it you as shortly as I can."

"What is it?" she said desperately, "what has happened? Are you angry with me? Have I done anything wrong?"

Something like a smile, the painful shadow of the smile she loved, quivered round Frank's mouth,

"How could you do wrong? I do not think you ever have done or thought wrong, my darling," the last words came softly like an amen; he knew he had no right to use them, and yet they were so sweet.

They brought back her courage, even as his failed him at the hardness of his task; at least, her worst fear was not realized, he did love her.

He seated her on a broad rock that faced the sea, he stood by her and strove to tell her his miserable secret.

Three times he tried to speak, and three times the words failed him, at last,

"Do you know," he asked, "why we have met here to-day?"

She tried to cheat her alarm by smiling.

"You told me last night," she said, and her voice grew tender, "to prove it wasn't a dream—that—that—"

"I remember; that you love me. Oh, Victoire! would to God it were."

The intense cry of love and pain in his words banished her nervous fear, and the constraint his coldness had caused.

"What is it, Frank?" she said, "I must love you, I can't help it, I wouldn't if I could—only let me comfort you."

Comfort him! when every fond word was a sharper torture than the last, when the touch of her soft hands, clinging to his, scorched him like fire, when the loving look of her eyes pierced him as a sword.

"You don't know what you are saying," he answered, "since I first saw you, my life has been one long lie."

Slowly there dawned on her the fore-

boding, not of his secret, but of some great sorrow such as she had not known till now. She did not speak or move, but sat, her eyes fixed on the changing hues of the sea, her face pale.

And Frank, his face averted, his hand leaning heavily on a ledge of rock, told her all. He left out nothing of his sin, pleaded nothing in extenuation, and his weakness told itself; the one thing he restrained was the sorrow which had worked repentance and his punishment. He did not speak of that, for how could she believe in it, or in the love which had dealt thus with her?

She read both though in the broken pauses of his short, sternly told sentences, in his quiet severity towards himself.

Frank ended and there was a great silence. So hushed, except for the ripple of the waves, the far off sounds from the shore that it might have been the silence of death itself, till the man's pent up burden of weakness, love, and remorse broke forth in one exceeding bitter cry, "Victoire, Victoire, speak to me!"

A strong shudder ran through her, his cry had been that of a sore agony, hers, as she answered, was that of a soul bent under a load it had not dreamt of.

"Why? Oh! why did you do this?"

How could he answer? how plead to her innocence his one excuse of blind passion?

"I see my sin now," he answered, humbly. "I do not think I ever dwelt on it before, or knew how I have hurt you."

"It isn't that," she burst out, "it isn't about me, but you—that you should do so."

Her tears came then, burning tears, such as had never seared her eyes before, tears for the baseness of one she had believed all noble, for the weakness of one counted strong, for the falsehood of one utterly loved and trusted.

He stooped and caught her hand in a wild impulse.

"Oh ! not for me, I am not worth one tear of yours, Victoire. Why don't you tell me how utterly vile I am, how I deserve?—I do not know what I deserve. Oh, my dear love !"

"Ah! that is the worst," she sobbed brokenly; "it is a sin to love you now, and how shall I learn not to? what can I do?"

She turned, half blinded and choked by her tears, appealing for help and counsel from him who had brought this sorrow on her, who had proved weak and unworthy, but who was still the man she loved.

A mad throb of joy made his heart beat more quickly for one moment, her love was with him still, in spite of his sin; and then repentance overcame him.

"Is such love as yours a sin?" he said, questioningly. "I cannot believe it, but if it is, my guilt has been worse than even I dreamed."

"Your guilt," she repeated. "No, you could not know, and you must have suffered so much!" the last word broke in a sob.

"Victoire, unless you would drive me mad, find no excuse for me, there is none, I know it, now I see your pain. Tell me what a wretch I have been, it will be true kindness."

"I cannot," she answered, looking at him with great mournful eyes. "I cannot be angry, I loved you too much."

The words wrung his heart; he bent lower over her hand till his lips touched it, and with that, the whole consciousness of her misery seemed to dawn on her.

"Oh, Frank!" she sobbed, "this is

good-bye for ever, and good-bye means so much, it means all, there is no hope and no help."

Tears started to his eyes, tears for her sorrow.

"No, dear," he said, "it does not mean all to you, you keep your innocence, and truth, and honour. I have sinned, and lose all indeed, for my one chance of salvation lay in you, and that is lost."

"No," she answered, "it is gained;" she forgot her pain for the moment, and her voice sounded sweet and clear. "Do you think I don't guess how terrible it must have been to tell me this, and how brave you were to do it? and if you have done this, you can do other hard things. Oh, Frank! you said you have hurt me,

but if I hear of you as doing right and being better than other men, and know that perhaps a thought of me has helped you, there will be no hurt, only joy."

A gleam as from heaven inspired her face as she spoke; for the first time, it was not her grace, or her tenderness, or sweetness, but her woman's nobleness and strength that shone forth and had power over Frank.

"Can I do this one thing for you?" he said, in a low voice, "God helping me, then, I will."

It was no less a vow for its quietness, the old thought of St. Augustine's ladder was with him unconsciously, and in losing his life he had found it, though he did not know it now.

"Thank you," she answered, simply ; the glory faded from her face and her tears fell like heavy rain.

They were standing facing each other now, nearly as they had done in the orchard at Polwhyn, not a year ago.

He drew her hands within his, as he had done then, in that sweet first moment of love's avowal, and kissed her on the forehead as before, but with how wide a difference. That first, long dead kiss, had been the seal of their love, this was that of its renunciation ; there was passion in this last pressure of his lips, but it was passion conquered, though not dead.

She did not shrink, only sighed, as if a storm had passed and she beheld the

barren land that had been so green and fair before the whirlwind swept over it; and so they parted.





CHAPTER IX.

“ I seemed to stand between two gulfs of sea,
On a dark strait of rock, and at my feet
The ship that bore me, broken.”

BOTHWELL.

“ **Q**UINLY two days more at Penzance,
Victoire.”

Victoire turned as her grandmother spoke, she was sitting by the window reading.

It was a month since Mr. Lyndon and his friend had left Penzance,

and in that time the girl had altered strangely ; her face was pale, and her dark eyes languid with heavy shades round them, shades that would have told many a woman of secret nightly tears. Her slight figure had a listless, inert droop, very different to its usual active grace.

She had been crushed to the very earth, and the sense of her sorrow still weighed her down. It was too soon for any reaction as yet, and all she wished was to drag on her life like a wounded creature, day by day ; attracting as little attention as she could.

She did not much care if people noticed her or not ; for pride, as well as love, had been smitten in that heavy blow which had fallen on her. It

was not a healthy state of mind, but it was a natural one.

Mrs. Treherne gazed wistfully at the girl, she was sure Victoire was unhappy, sure it was some secret pain which made her so unlike her bright sweet self, and she dimly guessed what the pain was.

She had noticed a change in Victoire since the day of Frank Lyndon's departure, and it flashed across her how blind she had been all this time.

What so likely as that Victoire had grown to care for Frank?

A year ago, the idea of her grandchild being in love had roused Mrs. Treherne's irritation—it was not so now. Mildred Treherne had usually been called a cold

woman, because her affections were few and deep-seated, so deep, that often she herself had not been aware of their force, till the loved object was lost to her.

She was not demonstrative, and it was not till Victoire's absence in London she learnt how dear the child was to her, how little she could bear the lack of her presence, and how all the love she had given to her younger son was his daughter's heritage.

So her manner to Victoire of late had been softer and tenderer than its wont, and now, though she longed to know the girl's sorrow, that she might comfort her, and theoretically would have held that she had a perfect right to know all her grandchild's thoughts, she felt a

woman's honourable reluctance to force from another woman a secret she would fain conceal.

Mrs. Treherne was hardly a woman to sympathize with what she usually called sentimental nonsense. If Victoire had let her thoughts wander to any other man, her grandmother would have had little patience with, far less pity for the trouble she saw in the girl's saddened eyes; but Frank was Richard Lyndon's grandson, and she could understand the girl's feeling for the descendant of the young Waterloo hero he so much resembled.

And there was another thing that made her still more sorry for Victoire; even if Frank should care for her, it would be quite impossible for Miss Treherne of

Polwhyn (Mrs. Treherne had made her will during the last few months) to marry an actor.

She thought over all this as she sat alone with Victoire in the drawing-room, busied with some embroidery wonderfully fine for the eyes of a woman of her years, but now and then looking down at the girl's bent head, and noting how the pages of the book remained unturned.

"There's the post," said Mrs. Treherne, as a sharp ring was heard at the bell. "I wonder if there is any news from Raymond."

A good deal of news from Raymond, apparently, for there were two letters in his hand, one addressed to his grandmother, the other to his cousin."

"I wonder why he has written to us both," said Victoire carelessly, "and by the same post."

It would indeed be difficult to say what demon inspires a certain number of unlucky men and women with the insane desire of rushing into the most tactless actions in their power, but certainly Raymond Marchant had been unfortunately under the influence of some such evil genius, when he wrote and despatched the two letters now under consideration.

Victoire opened and read hers, it was not very long.

"My dear Victoire,

"I have chosen this course of writing instead of speaking, as the means of

telling you something which has been in my mind, a long, a very long while.

"I do not know if you have ever seen, or guessed how large a part of my thoughts you have always occupied; I do not think you can have, but if so, this letter will be no surprise to you nor will——"

Here the page ended and Victoire in dumb amazement sat staring at the words; it was nearly a minute before she turned the page and could read,

"—the fact that there can be little happiness and no content for me in this life, unless the union between us be far

closer and dearer ; unless you, the only woman I have ever loved (this is no mere form of words, but true as death or life) will be my wife."

Victoire read no more, the blood suddenly mounted to her cheeks in a hot flush of astonished anger and sorrow.

"What is it, Victoire ?"

"Grandmamma."

"So, Raymond wants you to be his wife?" and Mrs. Treherne as she spoke drew the girl towards her.

"Has he told you ?"

"Yes, in this letter ; what is your answer, dear ?"

"I never could, never !"

What did the wailing sob in the words

mean? Mrs. Treherne's voice grew tenderer.

"But why does it pain you so, my child?"

"Because; because—Oh, I don't know; I can't tell."

"There is no reason for such distress, dear. I am sorry for the poor boy, but I should not like you to marry him; I do not think you would be happy. Don't tremble so," as she felt a shiver run through Victoire's hand, "but tell me why the idea of Raymond's being fond of you hurts you."

"I can't say, grandmamma."

"Can't you? then I will not ask you, but there is a sentence in Raymond's letter to me, I should like to read to you."

"What do you mean, grandmamma?"

Mrs. Treherne answered nothing, but read from Raymond's letter.

"A friend of mine, whom you all know, Dal Gordon, has written a comedietta which has been accepted at the 'Phœbus Theatre,' and was put into rehearsal a few days ago. The principal part is to be taken by a young lady for whom Victoire has a great admiration, Miss Nellie St. Claire."

Victoire looked up calmly, without showing very much interest; for Frank, while telling her all else, had carefully concealed the name of his wife.

"I remember her," she said, "we met

her one day in Kensington Gardens, but why——?"

"There is something more, my dear child," and Mrs. Treherne's voice trembled ever so slightly, as she read on.

"She was prevented two months ago from fulfilling an American engagement by a severe illness, from which she is only just recovering. She was separated some years ago from her husband, and though from all accounts he was far more in the wrong than she, they say that through all this time, while she was dangerously ill, he never even sent to inquire after her. I don't suppose you will guess that the fellow is none but your friend young Lyndon, who, you told me,

paid you a flying visit at Penzance some weeks ago."

Victoire's voice was very low as she said.

"I knew Mr. Lyndon was married," but it quivered at the last words, and some instinctive freemasonry broke down the bonds of reserve and pride and every thing but love between the two women, as she sobbed out her heart, kneeling by her grandmother's side, her face buried in the folds of the latter's dress.

"My poor child, I was afraid of this."

The old lady asked for no confession of whether Frank had worked knowingly towards this pitiful end, she knew

Polonius' method was not a safe one, and so let Victoire sob at her will, all she said at last, was—

"Did you care for him so much?"

No answer came in words, but the mute, appealing misery of the child's eyes was reply enough.

"I have been very blind, I should have thought of this, you must forgive me, dear."

"Forgive you, grandmamma?" said Victoire wonderingly and sadly. "You never knew, but he told me he was married."

"And yet you cared for him."

The girl was loyal to the man she loved, she would not let his fault be known even now.

"Yes," she answered. "But I am

punished enough ; I feel as though I only want to creep away and cry, and cry, and cry."

"My poor Victoire, my own, poor little girl !"





CHAPTER X.

"Anfangs wollt' ich fast verzagen
Und ich glaubt', ich trüg 'es nie ;
Und ich hab 'es doch getragen
Aber fragt mich nur nicht : wie ?"

Seine.

IT was an afternoon in early summer, three years later, and Victoire was standing in the drawing-room of her aunt, Mrs. Marchant's house in Curzon Street, ready dressed and waiting for her aunt, with whom she was going down to a concert

and rose show at the Crystal Palace, their cavaliers being Raymond and Dal Gordon, now known as a rising young dramatist and author.

Changes had taken place in the last three years. Nine months after that summer visit to Penzance, old Mrs. Treherne had died; quietly and with her last looks and thoughts given to Victoire. The two women had grown very near together in those last months, and when Mrs. Treherne died, Victoire felt as though all that had made life sweet to her had vanished, leaving her utterly alone.

She was very lonely; her Uncle George and his wife, with whom she naturally came to live, could not, with all their affection, supply the tender, engrossing

love, which her grandmother had given her, still less the sweeter, madder feeling she had known for a brief time. The girl felt that she was no longer best loved by any one, and so gradually learnt to find her best chance of happiness in living out of herself, till, from the inner solitude of her soul were born such sweet flowers of unselfishness and a pure loftiness of character as might never have bloomed in a fuller sunshine.

In outward show her life was brighter and gayer than it had been before; she saw much more general society, and had more of what is called amusement, living at her uncle's house, than had fallen to her lot in the old time, and in a way she enjoyed it. Nothing could ever be

the same as before that morning on the Lariggan rocks, she was a woman now, not a girl; but she did not let her lost love ruin her life, though it could not but cloud it. She was an heiress too, not a large one, as things go in these times, but with about a thousand a year and the old house, now shut up, at Pol-whyn, for her own.

It was about six months since Mrs. Marchant, Raymond's mother, had come over to England for her health, leaving her husband in India, and after staying some time with her brother and his wife, had taken a house in Curzon Street and insisted on Victoire's coming to her for the season. Victoire had yielded, and come to London for the first time since her visit there three years before.

It was not altogether willingly that she had accepted her Aunt Lois' invitation. She knew Raymond still cared for her, though, by an act of forbearance, for which Victoire was duly grateful, he had refrained from acquainting his mother with the fact; for Mrs. Marchant was a quick, impulsive, little woman, and having conceived a great affection for her niece, would have given her little peace on the subject. Still, in spite of his silence, Victoire knew that her cousin's feeling for her was only stronger and deeper than it had been three years before, and it pained her, knowing she could never return it.

For Frank was still her one supreme thought, his face still looked at her in her dreams, the sudden remembrance of

his voice would come to her, at times, making her heart ache with longing. Only once had she heard any thing of him, beyond what the papers told her, and that was when her grandmother died, and he sent her a short note without date, or address.

"Let me write these few words, and tell you how I feel for you, how I have felt for you since I heard of your sorrow. I have no right to do this, but do not be angry with me for it. I could not help myself thinking of you,—as when do I not think?—and longing for the power of saying, or doing, something that should comfort you in your great grief, as no word from me ever can.

"F. L."

Was Victoire very much to blame, in that Frank's wish was fulfilled, and his short note comforted and pained her more than any thing else; that through her long wakeful nights of misery, it was pressed to her lips and wetted by her tears?

This was all two years before; now the passionate grief for her loss had long ago spent itself, and few would have dreamt of any shadow of sorrow underlying the fair face, or the beautiful, earnest eyes. It was true there was a deeper and tenderer soul in her loveliness than is usual at twenty-one; but the sadness lay too deep to be guessed at by a chance eye, and her joy no man could take from her. In these years she had attained that which

"The Gods approve ;
The depth and not the tumult of the soul,
The fervour, not the impotence of love."

And it was that which gave a peculiar sweetness to her fairness, "the outward expression of a most fair mind."

For of Victoire's beauty there could be no doubt now, whatever there might have been three years before—she was a lovely woman, of a rare and high type of beauty. So thought Raymond, as the party seated themselves in the open carriage that was to take them to Sydenham, and so thought Dal Gordon, who had not seen Victoire since her last visit to London.

The barouche was soon turning down Grosvenor Place in the bright June sunlight, and its occupants were one

and all in good spirits. Mrs. Marchant had an Anglo-Indian capacity for amusement; Victoire was quiet, but bright, and her presence made Raymond cheerful; he was not a man to easily give up anything he had set his heart on, and was by no means hopeless yet. Dal Gordon looked on with a secret amusement in his lazy blue eyes; he did not lack shrewdness, and saw far more clearly than Raymond, how little chance the latter really had.

"It is the first time you and I have met for a long time, Miss Treherne," said Dal, "age creeps on us apace, I mean on me."

"Does time make exceptions?" said Victoire, laughing; "or have I any grey hairs to suggest your remark? You

ought to have, Mr. Gordon, burning the midnight oil as you must."

Dal shrugged his shoulders.

"Midnight gas, you mean; well, my landlady has increased the rent of my burners from sixpence to ninepence a week. I don't know if the result of my dramatic labours will justify the increased expenditure; my own impression is that it won't."

"I thought the new play was to set the Thames on fire."

"No such luck, and even if it did, the Thames wouldn't last for ever, and then we should be at the mercy of the gas companies again, till science and electricity, &c., &c. I know though who prophesied my accomplishing the hydro-pyrotechnic sensation you men-

tioned. He," nodding at Raymond, "is as bad as the 'jottings' column of the *Era*."

"There's gratitude," said the gentleman referred to.

"Tell me about it yourself then," said Victoire. Very fair she looked, leaning a little forward, and a pretty brightness of enjoyment on her face; but Dal shook his head.

"Not if I know it, Miss Treherne; you are not going to entrap me into talking shop, and then turn round on me for boring you."

"Very well, then, I shall believe all Raymond has told me."

"Phew!" said Dal, "what a refreshing confession of faith in this sceptical age. However, if that is the case, I

feel it my duty to clear your mind of cant."

"I say," put in Raymond; "draw it mild," but Dal took no heed of him.

"Mrs. Marchant, Miss Treherne, the new play, by which, I suppose, you refer to my dramatic effort now in rehearsal at the 'Polyphonic' Theatre, is in a great part 'cake,' and such remarkably heavy cake, that I shall be very much surprised if even a British audience swallow it. However, it will be used better than after its deserts; the cast is first rate."

Raymond's face grew unaccountably black.

"Raymond didn't tell me who were to act in it."

A quick gleam of amusement shot

over Dal Gordon's face; he remembered certain passages between himself and Raymond.

"Didn't he? then he was remiss, for the hero is taken by the best *jeune premier* on the stage, and an old friend of yours, I believe, Lyndon."

Victoire had guessed what was coming, and steeled her face beforehand, so that her cousin, though watching her jealously, could catch no change of expression.

"And a capital good actor he is," said Dal. "He used to lack force and fire, but he has improved wonderfully in the last years, and I'm lucky to get him for my hero. Have you ever seen him, Mrs. Marchant?"

"No."

"You haven't had any great loss," said her son.

"I don't know about that," answered Dal. "He is wonderfully handsome, and is, I think, the only man on the stage who knows how to make love."

"A woman would be a better judge of that, Mr. Gordon," said Mrs. Marchant.

"Perhaps so; but there are very few men I can see making love on the stage without feeling, that if I were the girl's brother, or even an ordinary acquaintance of hers, I couldn't resist kicking the fellow," replied Dal, in his usual indolent manner. "Now Lyndon isn't like that, he is a gentleman, poor fellow, and makes love like one, not like a cad."

"Why do you say 'poor fellow?'" asked Victoire quietly."

"Because I'm sorry for him."

"I didn't know you could spare any pity from his wife," growled Raymond, forgetting his manners in his irritation.

"I am sorry for them both," said Dal, steadily, with the *blasé* drawl quite gone out of his voice. "For I think that it was an ill-matched marriage, that there were faults on both sides, and that both have reaped a life-long unhappiness from it. She the most, poor, little thing, for I fancy the love was more on her side than his. I know both her and Lyndon, and I pity and like them both."

"Is Mrs. Lyndon nice?" said Victoire,

eagerly, the words were commonplace; but none there could understand the generous feeling her tone and look told of.

"She is a true, sweet, honest, little woman, who has hardened herself and ruined her life by one act of impetuous temper and folly."

"Folly!" repeated Raymond, too thoroughly put out to agree with anything or anyone.

"Yes, folly, and nothing worse;" said Dal, roused in his turn. "I've told you I like Mrs. Lyndon, and now I add that I thoroughly respect her."

"You think she really loved her husband after all, then," said Victoire, in a low tone.

"I am sure of it, though she tries to hide it, and succeeds with most people; and I think, too, she has repented their separation the more since. You asked me, Miss Treherne, why I called Frank Lyndon 'poor fellow;' one reason is, that his life is very uncertain, he had an attack of *angina pectoris* last year, and of course it may return at any minute."

He could not help noticing the change in Victoire's face; for one moment it was awful, then with a strong effort she recovered herself, but its look was still as Chaucer describes Custance's when she "stant and looked hir aboute." Dal was a gentleman, and he turned and made some trifling remark to Mrs. Marchant.

But Raymond gazed steadily at Victoire, and as he did so, a sharp pang smote his heart. He was sure now of what he had only guessed before, that she loved Lyndon, and the certainty of this changed his feeling of anger into pity.

"Poor child!" he thought, as he saw the misery in her face. "Hang Dal for having told her that," and then the pity was overcome by burning irrational jealousy and hatred of the man who had won without wearing the prize he had coveted so intensely himself.

And Victoire sat very still, hearing the noise of the wheels, and her aunt's laugh, and seeing as in a dream the green fields that skirted the road; but

Dal's words, "his life is very uncertain," were the only thing present to her consciousness, except a feeling of ineffable wretchedness.

The drive was very silent after that, and Victoire could have told little of the concert, only that the mighty wail of the orchestra in Wagner's 'Faust' overture, seemed some relief to her suppressed silent agony. Nor did she see much of the flowers, as they wandered round afterwards. Frank was ill, perhaps unhappy, and she could do nothing for him.

Raymond was strangely silent, and kind and tender, shielding her from his mother's flow of talk, and taking care of her in a grave gentle way, very unlike his usual superior air. They dined at

the Palace, and he saw that she eat, instead of leaving everything untasted, as she would have done if left to herself, and made her drink some champagne, which she very rarely touched. It did her good and seemed to break the stupor in which she had moved for the last few hours.

"You look tired," he said to her, when the dinner was over, and they were sitting by the window in the quiet purple twilight, watching the moving crowds on the terraces below and waiting for the fireworks to begin. "Are you?"

"No," answered Victoire, "only my head aches a little, and I like this cool air."

"A stroll would do you good, perhaps the air is fresher outside. Will

you come?" That's right," as Victoire rose. "Dal, take care of my mother, Victoire and I are going down for a crawl in the grounds, we shan't be long."

"Does your head ache, dear?" said Mrs. Marchant, compassionately, "what a pity I didn't bring my salts."

The fresh evening air, the faint sweet smell of the flowers and the moist earth were better than any sal volatile for relieving the poor girl's throbbing brain. She and Raymond threaded their way through the crowd that swayed up and down the terraces, laughing and talking till the first rocket whizzed and burst, and was followed by the long simultaneous "Oh" from ten thousand voices.

Raymond had found a seat for his cousin on the pediment of a large statue ; they sat there a little while, quite silent, watching the fireworks, and each occupied with their own thoughts ; at last Raymond broke the silence.

"Is your headache any better, Victoire?"

"Much, thanks to you," then in her gratitude for his kindness in bringing her away from the necessity of jarring talk, she added : " It is like old times, you and I together, you taking care of me."

"That is my only wish," his voice shook a little, " Victoire, can I never have my desire ? Never have the right to shelter you, to guide and keep you from all sorrow ?"

"I thought you understood, I thought you knew," was all she could then say.

"I do know too much; you mean, you can never love me!"

"Not as—not as—"

"Not as you love, or have loved some one else. Victoire, do you think I am blind? that I cannot see the reason your heart will not open to me, is because another man holds it?"

"No, the key is lost," and her words ended in a sob.

"I wish I could think that, for then perhaps I might find it. Victoire, dear, think a little before you answer. Think how long I have loved you—my whole life—think that there is never another to whom you can be what you have been

to me, the one beautiful hope that has gladdened my life."

Was this really Raymond who was pleading with such utter passionate fervour? Victoire felt dazed and bewildered, but a great pity for him filled her heart. Her own sorrow had taught her strength and tenderness, and she knew that the truth was his due and hers.

"I have thought," she said. "Raymond, I am so sorry for you; but it cannot be, you are right in your guess, I cannot care for you, because I have loved some one else."

She did not bow her head as she spoke those last words, her love was no shame to her even now.

Both knew that they need say no more.

Her impulse of lofty feeling and generous trust raised Raymond too; when he spoke next it was with a ring of unselfish truth, rare to his voice.

"Thank you," he answered, "thank you, dear, for being so true, it was like yourself, only remember this, don't let what I have said ever stand between us, if I can ever help or aid you in any way, but tell me of it, and trust in me as if I were your brother and not your lover. I will not fail you, dear, even though it hurt me to the heart."

What did he mean? He hardly knew himself, neither did she, but the steady voice comforted her, the promise of faith and strength seemed to help her.

"I will remember," she said simply
like a child.

"I shall remember too," he answered.



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CHAPTER XI.

" Oh ! benefit of ill, now I find true,
That better is by evil still made better,
And ruined love when it is built anew,
Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater."

SHAKESPEARE'S "SONNETS."

" DEAR Nellie,

 "Before I answer your letter, I must thank you for the feeling that prompted it. It was kind and unselfish of you to wish to take care of a man whose irritable temper you know well, because you think his health

needs tending; I thank you for your generous offer, even while I cannot accept it.

"I cannot accept it, for indeed both you and I are better as we are; we have lived so long apart, that we have become strangers to each other, and should be uncomfortable and constrained together. The old misunderstanding has rankled so long as to kill all that might have remained of the old affection. I tell you this frankly, that you may feel it is better as it is.

"Nor do I think it will be well for us to meet, or hold any intercourse with one another, except that of kindly thought. I am grateful to you for having had the courage to break down the barrier of pride and unkindness be-

tween us. You ask me to forgive you; I will not answer that there is nothing to forgive, for there is much on both sides, on yours as on mine; I forgive you, my poor child, as freely as you have forgiven me.

"I return the letter enclosed in yours and thank you for having sent it. Though what is past be past, I am glad, honestly glad, to find the foolish doubt I once had of my wife's honour was unfounded, and to acknowledge the wrong my suspicion did you.

"Your husband,

"F. LYNDON."

Frank sighed heavily as he finished his letter, and enclosed with it a worn, faded epistle addressed to "Major Verrall,

Jermyn Street," and consisting of a very few words.

"Dear Major Verrall,

"Thank you for the Richmond invitation, but by some accident you forgot to mention my husband's name, and as it is not my custom to dine out without him, I am afraid I must refuse.

"Yours,

"ELEANOR LYNDON."

Nellie had vindicated her fame and crushed her pride eight years too late.

Frank sealed his letter, and pushed the elbow chair in which he was sitting away from the writing table, so that he could look out from the open window at the soft summer evening, growing greyer and

deeper across the river, and hiding the Victoria Tower and Abbey spires; the lights were lit along the Embankment and the puffing steamers were fewer than they had been an hour before. It was a Sunday evening in June, and Frank felt the influence of the calm sober hour, the secret sadness of summer twilight, as he leant back in his chair, musing over the train of thought suggested to him by his answer to Nellie's passionate entreaties that he would forgive her and take her back.

At last one word escaped him, "Vic-
toire."

Dearer to him than when they had parted on those grey rocks in the morning sunlight, nearer to him in spite of the years they had been severed, in that

his love for her had had its work in him, as was shown in the letter he had just written, and its different tone to the one the same circumstances would have drawn from him three years before.

He did not think this; he only let his thoughts wander back to the autumn at Polwhyn, the summer at Penzance, and dwell on the memory of her face and words.

"Hallo! Lyndon, blind-man's holiday here."

"Gordon," and Frank sprang up. "I'll light the gas at once. Have you come for a chat over the new play?"

"Hang the new play! I'm sick of the words, though I suppose I did

come for that. Don't light up though; I like this half darkness, especially if illuminated by baccy."

"A strong hint," said Frank, laughing, "have you any? if not, there are some good weeds on that mantel-piece."

"Thank you," said Dal. "I say though, didn't the doctor tell you to give up smoking?"

"He told me to do a good many things. There are some strawberries, somewhere in the dark, Gordon. Likewise you may possibly discover a bottle of hock."

"Ah!" answered Dal, and in another moment the cool clink of ice and glass, and a little gush of liquid was heard. "It strikes me you are going in rather extensively for dessert."

"Dinner," said Lyndon briefly, "I haven't had anything else."

"Nothing else. Aren't you well?"

Frank laughed.

"That's the worst of a man's getting a reputation for ill health; he is called to account for everything he does ever after. I'm well enough, and if I were not, Hamlet's philosophy on the subject is soundest; 'the readiness is all,' if one only had it."

"Aye, but who has?"

"Not I, for one," said Frank, then in a brighter tone, "I don't feel at all inclined to quit this pleasant, toilsome sphere, yet awhile. Not at all events till I have played leading business."

"Why! you do that now."

"Not what I call leading business;

these young lovers and heroes of romance are not what I mean by it. We are a cowardly set now-a-days, Gordon, we actors; except Brandreth, there isn't a man who has the pluck to attempt tragedy. A few, old, worn out men still stick to it; but where among us young fellows is the man who even fails in 'Hamlet' or 'Othello' or 'Macbeth?' "

"Well, set the example."

"I tell you, I, too, am a coward. I can preach, but I funk a great character just as much as the rest do. Of course it partly lies with the managers; Shakespeare spells ruin, except at two or three houses. But you've given me a chance, Gordon, in this piece of yours, and I mean to do all I know in it."

"I don't believe even you will save the piece."

"It won't need saving; don't be down in the mouth."

"Well! you and Marchant do your very best to keep me from that; by the way, he and I went down to the Crystal Palace on Wednesday with his mother and an old acquaintance of yours, who inquired after you, Miss Treherne. Do you remember her?"

"Quite well, has she changed?"

"Very much prettier; not so much of a child as she used to be, but the same otherwise, wonderfully honest and frank for a girl."

Frank turned the conversation; Victoire's name was sacred to him, and

he needed to hear no praise of her to him ; who knew and loved her as none else could.





CHAPTER XII.

“ Out, out, brief candle
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour on the stage
And then is seen no more.”

MACBETH.

“ **B**UT I really can't go, Raymond,
my neuralgia is racking.”

“That settles it of course,
do you know anyone who would like to
take your place?”

“It's too late to find anyone now, at
half-past six.”

"Then Victoire and I must be content with each other's society."

"My dear boy, I don't think that will do."

"My dear mother, why on earth not?"

"I don't think it is usual," said Mrs. Marchant doubtfully. "But I don't know; things have altered so since I left England, and if you consider it all right."

"Of course I do," answered Raymond, "why! mother, not even Mrs. Grundy herself would object to my chaperoning Victoire to the theatre, especially as we have a private box. Here, Vic," as the girl entered the room, "mother doesn't think we are equal to taking care of each other this evening. What do you say?"

"I had settled not to go since Aunt Lois—" Victoire began, but Mrs. Marchant broke in,

"Nonsense, my dear, as if I were going to let you stay at home; I think Mr. Gordon is a very nice, young fellow, and I want a faithful report of his play."

The pain and pleasure at the idea of seeing Frank, even in an assumed character, were so equally balanced, that though Victoire had felt a relief, in thinking she was not going to the 'Polyphonic' this evening, she now was glad that she was.

"If it's settled so," she said, "I had better run up and dress, I haven't too much time."

She came downstairs as the dinner bell

was ringing, very pale and looking all the paler for her black dress of soft gauze with no ornaments except the milk-white pearls at her throat, and some tube-rose blooms, placed like separate white stars in her dark hair; but she had never seemed lovelier in Raymond's eyes.

"You have changed your name," he said, as she entered the room. "Our Lady of Sorrows instead of our Lady of Victories."

"Sorrow must come before victory," she answered gravely. "Do you remember telling me of that motto you saw on the old bed in Victor Hugo's house at Guernsey,

"*'Nox, Mors, Lux?'*"

"If there be light," half muttered

to himself nineteenth century Raymond.

They were going downstairs, Victoire before her cousin ; she caught his words and turned round with a flash that was almost an inspiration.

"I know there is," she said, "but sometimes it takes the night and death to make us feel it."

She spoke with an assured conviction, and Raymond felt for one moment his little cousin had a light and a truth within her, born out of suffering to which he was a stranger.

In another hour they were seated in their box, which was the stage one, O.P. of the 'Polyphonic Theatre.' Victoire, after an indifferent glance round the house, drew herself rather behind the

amber satin curtains, and seemed very little inclined to talk; but Raymond was rather conversational, and she roused herself to listen, and now and then to reply.

"I suspect Dal is awfully nervous," said Raymond, as the orchestra after its preliminary agony gave one terrific blast, and its various members started away in that frantic race with one another which commonly distinguishes histrionic orchestras in England. "He wouldn't let his own people come to-night, and told me he would rather, we didn't."

"And what did you say?"

"I told him to be blowed. I wish that trombone were not," he added, as the instrument in question gave a more

than usually awful snort. "I suppose he was here, behind the scenes, an hour ago."

"Will he come round and see us, do you think?"

"If the piece be a success."

"I thought it was sure to."

"Nothing is sure in this world. It seemed good to me, but I am only one unit of the British public, and I can't say how that monster or its advisers, the critics, will like Dal's idea."

"Oh they must, they can't help it!"

"Well, we shall see," answered Raymond, oracularly. "It is well cast, at any rate," he added, carefully avoiding mention of Lyndon's name more from shyness than any other feeling.

Meanwhile the critics in the stalls below are holding high festival over the prospective "slating" of poor Dal's dramatic effort.

"'Camiola, Orlando, Prince of Arragon,'" says one brother of the pen to his neighbour. "Hang me if the fellow hasn't been modernizing 'The Maid of Honour!' 'Love's Fault, new and original drama by Dalrymple Gordon.' Yes, very new, and remarkably original."

"Look there," says his more observant companion, pointing to a short paragraph on the other page of the programme :

"The story which forms the plot of this drama has already served as the subject of a tragedy by an English dramatist,

second, and only second, to Shakespeare, Philip Massinger. Admitting his version of Camiola's story to be the true one, his treatment of it admits of no criticism, and 'The Maid of Honour' is a play, the beauty of which does not need praise of mine. Still, I was presumptuous enough to fancy that the story admitted of another and wholly different working out, and 'Love's Fault' is the result of my belief. I have not touched on the great dramatist's ground, but have taken the subject as he found it, and striven to treat it in an independent manner."

"' *Qui s'excuse s'accuse,*' " mutters critic number one, as the drum comes in first in the noisy race, and the other instruments set up a discordant yell of fury at their several discomfiture.

But Dal does not deserve the censure, considering the existence of Massinger's play, he has succeeded well in his difficult task, and worked with both freedom and originality. Certainly he has not adhered a whit more closely than his great predecessor to Camiola Turinga's real history, but the spirit of his work differs entirely from that of Massinger. His heroine is tenderer, more generous and self-forgetful than Massinger's; but it is the character of his hero that Dal has entirely altered, both from the original Orlando and Massinger's Bertoldo, and so changed the whole complexion of the plot. His Orlando is weak and somewhat selfish, but brave, chivalrous, and impassioned; a different man altogether to the pitiful sneak Bertoldo, who fills

the position of hero in Massinger's play, and this change having rendered necessary a further alteration in the argument, Dal has made Orlando's baseness, in his repudiation of Camiola's hand, after she has liberated him by paying his ransom, only apparent.

He has achieved this by the introduction of another woman, likewise in love with Orlando, who, when the latter is liberated by Camiola's means, contrives by a Boccaccio-like intrigue of a ring and a letter to persuade him of the falsity of the woman he loves, and to whom he owes, and has been glad to owe his liberty. Very well had the young author worked out the scene which forms the close of the first act. The love and rage of the man who fancies he is deceived by

his betrothed, his fierce, galled pride at owing his release to her, and thus being bound to wed her, tainted though she be, his resolve to go back to slavery rather than purchase freedom at such a cost; the reaction of cheated love and trust, shown in his stern repulse and bitter reproach of Camiola, when she enters, innocent and joyful at the release of her lover, only to be overwhelmed by the storm of scorn and anger she cannot understand, and repelled by Orlando, falls fainting as the scene closes; all this was vigorously and freshly, even if somewhat crudely, portrayed.

The acting would have saved a worse play; the Camiola entered into her part, and acted it with a tender grace and pathos which, joined with her beauty,

disarmed criticism, and Frank Lyndon seemed to have caught the very spirit of his *rôle*, so that his rendering of it passed into that higher region of acting where "the art itself is nature."

Even Victoire, thrilling, despite herself, from his swift look of recognition, as the play proceeded, forgot him or confused him in Orlando.

The second act is devoted to the interior workings of the plot; in it Camiola learns of the intrigue that has ruined her own and her lover's happiness, but lets him remain mistaken as to her character; otherwise the lines of the original story are followed pretty closely. Orlando, ordered by the emperor either to renounce his knighthood or marry his plighted

bride, true to his weakness, and perhaps tempted by his passion, chooses the latter alternative. It is not till the last scene of the third act, in the cathedral ready decked for the wedding, that Camiola lets her lover know how he has been deceived, and refusing, herself, to fulfil the marriage-contract, avows her intention of taking the veil, and vindicates her honour, so that he knows the jewel he has lost, as she ends,

" You could not trust me, Oh ! my lord, once dear
You never loved me for you could not trust."

Then Orlando's passion of remorse and love breaks forth. He does not ask for forgiveness, only a chance of winning it ; let his penance be what Camiola will, long years away from her, if so, that at

the end, he may die at her feet; all he prays is that she will not take the irrevocable vow, that he may still hold a hope, however faint, however distant, of winning her at last.

None who saw that scene forgot it, even in what came after, none could forget the look of Orlando's face, the terrible yearning and love and sorrow that filled it, as kneeling and clasping Camiola's dress, he entreated his boon; none forgot his words, as their intensity of utterance sounded through the hushed house.

"Oh, my star, my heart, this at least is true. I have not trusted, but I have loved. The thought of your fall was my worst agony, the joy I have now you cannot take away. You are pure, and

my vision of a perfect womanhood was no vain dream, but a truth—the truth that has saved me, that shall save me to the end."

He had risen and stood, his hands stretched out towards Camiola, but his eyes fixed on Victoire, as they had been through the last speech; as he ended, Camiola turned towards him with one word,

"Hope!"

"Hope!" he repeated, "hope!"

What agony was it that suddenly made him reel and catch his breath? A spasm passed over his face, and he would have fallen had he not been caught by those nearest to him. The actors gathered round him in consternation at the gasping cry of "air, air," and the startled

audience half rose from their seats;
then the curtain fell and shut out the
brilliant scene that had ended so
strangely.





CHAPTER XIII.

"If you be, what I think you, some sweet dream,
I do but ask you to fulfill yourself.

* * * * *

Sweet dream be perfect, I shall die to-night,
Stoop down and seem to kiss me ere I die."

THE PRINCESS.

TEN minutes passed, Victoire sat silent in a stunned agony, she saw the glaring light, and gilding, and yellow satin round her, heard the murmuring of wonderment and sur-

mise of the startled audience ; but she did not notice a gray-haired gentleman rise and leave his stall, and if she had, would not have known that he was Sir William Buller, the famous doctor, and had gone round to see about Frank, whom he had attended before.

There was no call for actors or author ; the audience had forgotten all except Frank's strange, wild look, and his fall forward. They were becoming impatient to learn the sequel of the last scene, when the manager appeared before the curtain and regretted to inform them that Mr. Lyndon's sudden indisposition would prevent the conclusion, that evening, of "Love's Fault," but the curtain would rise as soon as possible on the " musical folly " that formed the after-piece.

Victoire, full of the anguish she could scarcely control, turned towards Raymond, she saw in his eyes no jealousy, only tenderness, pity and love, and she stretched her hand out, grasping his with the nervous closeness of a blind person outreaching for comfort.

The band had struck up Auber's overture of "Les Sirènes;" the swaying and happy rhythm of the bright, gay music, made her feel as though heart and brain would burst with misery.

"Raymond, I must know more. It looked like death on his face. Oh, help me!" her breath came brokenly between her words, from the agony of suspense which choked her utterance.

"I will do what I can," he said, drawing her to the back of the box,

"but be calm, dear, it may be only a faint. I'll go round to the stage and ask Dal."

There was a wild thankfulness in her eyes, but she still trembled visibly, and Raymond was loth to leave her.

"Oh, go!" she said imploringly, and he went.

Just outside, he heard the click of a latch, a door in the wall before the stage opened and Dal Gordon appeared, terribly pale.

"Well!" said Raymond.

"His old complaint, breast pang; the spasm is over now, but there is very little hope. I came—" and he hesitated a moment, "Raymond, the poor fellow wants to see her, your cousin, before the end comes. He asked me to tell her."

Raymond bent his brows in a frown which Dal misunderstood.

"You can't deny it him," said the latter rather indignantly. "I don't know if she has ever cared for him; but if you had seen his look, as he beckoned to me, and gasped her name in my ear, you would pity him."

"I will tell her," was all Raymond answered. He went back to the box, where he found Victoire standing in the darkest corner at the back, her hands raised and clenched as though she were unable to bear the torture of uncertainty; she did not speak, only looked at him as if dreading his tidings, he had never seen her before like this moved out of her quiet self, and it half alarmed him.

"He is very ill," he said. "He wants to see you."

Her whole face changed, with one effort she seemed to regain her self-control, she was only a little paler and stiller than her wont.

"Can I go now?" she asked quietly.

Her cousin wrapped her cloak round her, pulling the hood over her head, so that no gossips should see her face; then he and she passed out, Dal was waiting for them outside, and led the way down some winding stairs to the side wings, which were now crowded with ballet girls dressed as Louis XV. musketeers; some of them looked curiously at Victoire, with that half bold, half defiant expression which the world teaches an underbred woman, and which is the

weapon she faces it with. Victoire did not heed them, she followed Dal across the stage, to the door of the green-room where Frank had been carried.

Outside the door was the manager; Dal spoke a few words to him in an undertone, he entered the green-room, from which, in a moment, he returned with Sir William Buller.

"He is in no pain now," said the latter. "Can I speak to this young lady a moment?"

He drew Victoire a little apart from the rest. Raymond and Dal standing together.

"You are a friend of poor Lyndon's?" the great doctor said inquiringly.

She looked at him with such pure, sad

eyes, that Sir William felt ashamed of certain vague suspicions that had crossed his mind.

"Yes," she said. "Is he very ill?"

"Dying."

She put up her hand as if to ward off a blow, but she did not cry, only turned death white as the flowers in her hair.

"You had to know," Sir William said kindly, "before you could see him. I tell you honestly, there is hardly any hope, but I shall still try for life; five minutes alone with him is all I can allow you, and you must be very quiet."

She looked gravely and steadily at him, he saw he could trust her, and

opened the door ; she entered, it closed, and she was alone with Frank once more.

He was lying on a hastily improvised bed, composed of mattresses and cushions ; the gas light fell on his face and his rich dress of crimson velvet brocaded with silver, of which the doublet and point-lace collar had been loosened for the sake of air. His dark hair fell damp on his forehead, but he turned his head as Victoire entered, and the old smile came back to his face as he murmured.

"At last."

She knelt by his side, trying to speak, but no words would come except an echo of his own.

"At last."

"At the last," he said, "I never thought to have you with me, when it came to this; it is not so hard now."

He stretched his hand out slowly, but not feebly, and drawing hers within it, placed it on his heart, still holding it in his clasp.

"Let it rest there," he said, "till death comes, he is very near now. No," as she started and looked wildly round as for help, "they can do nothing for me. It is very strange, I have always feared death, and yet I am quiet now."

His sight was growing dim, but he saw the large tears gathering in her eyes.

"My dearest," he said, "my own sweet,

I can't feel it hard with you by me; I know if I had lived you would never have come near me, I should never have spoken to you again, and death makes it all plain. Do you forgive me still, Victoire? mine was a poor and selfish love, but it was the best I had to give."

"I love you," she said, "I love you, as I always did, before every one, first and last."

He looked at her with a strange divining glance from under eyelids already heavy with the languor of death.

"First and last," he repeated dreamily. "First and last! stay with me now to the end, it will not be long. And kiss me once, dear Victoire,

I have longed for your kiss all these years."

She bent down and laid her lips to his in one long full kiss. The supreme moment of her life held her in its might, her soul was filled with an awful intense joy, darkened by the shadow of the great sorrow already standing on the threshold. Love stronger than death supported her, as her lips clave to Frank's in the sacrament kiss of a long farewell.

From the stage sounded music, and noise, and voices ; from the street outside, the roll of wheels and the discordant street cries ; yet those two in that small room, with its strange surroundings, were nearer together in this last hour, and further removed from all other life than

they had ever been before. Sir William Buller came in, looked at Frank, felt his pulse, and sat silent and grave. So the minutes passed on with no word spoken, Frank's breath growing more laboured; Victoire sitting still and pale beside him, her eyes fixed upon him.

A change came over his face, there was a spasm and struggle for breath; he raised himself uttering Victoire's name, turned towards her, then suddenly fell back, his head on her breast, her arms holding him.

So he lay for a few moments in the clasp of the purest and deepest love his life had known. His eyes opened with the look she knew, then closed slowly as in sleep; sleep had come to him, Victoire held her love, hers now, hers

at last, at the last; hers, who should never greet, or part from him again.

All over now, the passionate love, the temptation, the hard struggle, the amends and remorse, the weary longing for a forbidden joy; nothing remaining but the dead face, calm in its beauty, resting on her breast, as it had never rested in life; and the memory of a joy and sorrow such as she could not know ever again through the long years.

A hand was placed on her shoulder, she laid Frank's head on its pillow, kissed the brow once, then rose, her gaze still fixed on him.

It was Raymond's voice that trembled, as it said, "don't cry, yet, dear."

She turned her eyes towards her cousin, there was no sorrow in her face,

it was only as though a veil had fallen on it, never to be lifted on earth.

"It is not a thing for tears," she said.

"It is a life long grief."






CHAPTER XIV.

“ Love only reigns in death, though art
Can find no comfort for a broken heart.”

FORD.—“ THE BROKEN HEART.”

T was an evening in July, a calm evening, after a hot, weary day, Victoire rose from the easy-chair where she had been lying back all the afternoon. Her face was as colourless as her white dress, her great dark eyes looked strangely out of the sunken

cheeks, and the lips were dry and feverish. No wonder Mrs. Marchant had written to her sister-in-law, lamenting Victoire's severe nervous attack which had proceeded from the shock of seeing the young actor, she knew, fall dead on the stage. This was all Mrs. Marchant had heard of the night at the 'Polyphonic,' or of her niece's heart-broken, hopeless misery, and silent wretchedness that none could share, when Frank's face haunted the girl's eyes, and his voice sounded in her ears, till the sense of her loss rushed on her in all its fullness, and the hot tears scorched her eyes. Raymond kept his cousin's secret well.

Victoire was quiet this evening, Mrs. Marchant pronounced her fast recover-

ing, and only needing change of air to set her up. Victoire smiled and acquiesced, and when her aunt had departed, having in view a long shopping expedition, and a call on an old Indian friend, the girl rose up, dressed herself and went out alone; she had one place to visit, and this was her last evening in town. She was to leave for Truro on the morrow.

Her goal was at Brompton, a pleasant, leafy garden, where the trees rustled and whispered over white stones, one of which was newly set up, and bore the name of "Frank Lyndon, aged 31;" here she stopped.

All her love and sorrow rested there, and yet not so, for the pain and the joy were set as jewels in her heart, to live

for ever and ever in the past that was her very own.

There was no one near her; she leant her head on the cold, white cross that stood at the head of the grave, and her tears dropped slowly on the marble; when suddenly she felt the presence of another person.

She looked up, and saw Frank's wife in her widow's weeds.

An instinct taught Nellie that this must be the girl her husband had loved, whom she had heard of as having been with Frank at the last—her name unknown—and had hated and envied ever since. She looked at Victoire with a fierce jealousy in her blue eyes, Victoire met her gaze steadily and bravely, then spoke, "Mrs. Lyndon."

"Well!" said Nellie in a hard tone, then passionately: "Why are you here? Was it you who were with my husband when he died?"

"Yes," answered Victoire, and there was no shame in her voice, as she continued. "I could not help caring for him. I did not know when I let myself love him that I could never be his wife; when he told me that, we parted, and never met till—till—"

"You did not know he was married," said Nellie incredulously.

"Do you think I could speak to you now, if I had?" said Victoire, an involuntary ring of pride in her voice. "He told me of it that last day we spent together, three years ago."

"And you loved him," said Frank's

wife, passionately, "you loved him, but I loved him too. Can you believe that? I, who spoilt his life, whom he once called his shame and disgrace. I loved him so well, so well that I wish I could die here and forget all my life. No one would believe in my sorrow if I spoke of it; you do not, no one can but myself."

"I do," said Victoire. "You must have loved him and——"

"He did not love me," said Nellie, sadly and bitterly. "It is no use to pretend to you, to whom he must have told everything."

"He told me nothing," said Victoire, eagerly; "nothing of the cause of your separation."

"Did he not?" answered Nellie, "that

was good of him, at least ; but why are you here? have you come to boast of his love for you, and tell me what I know, that I have no real right to wear this mourning?"

"I was here," said Victoire, in a low voice, "to see his grave once, as I think he would have liked me to have done. I will not stay here now, since it hurts you to see me."

She was turning to leave, but Nellie laid her hand on her arm to detain her. Mrs. Lyndon's face was softened as she spoke.

"You are good and true," she said, "I don't wonder he loved you. I loved him as you did, I think more—of course, you don't—but I was his wife once. People would say we two ought to hate each

other, but I don't think so, for we know each other's grief, as no one else can;" she stretched out her hand as she finished, humbly enough; Victoire grasped it fully and warmly.

They left the grave and walked together to the gate of the cemetery, then Nellie spoke again.

"Shall I ever see you? Will you let me? I know so few good women."

"I leave London to-morrow," said Victoire. "I will write to you, if you will write to me, and if I come to town again, we will try to know each other really."

Nellie nodded, something prevented her speaking at the moment, but as they were parting, having exchanged addresses, she spoke entreatingly.

"Miss Treherne, Frank forgave me before he died, will you, who cared for him, forgive me?"

For all answer Victoire turned and kissed her, and both felt the first real comfort and healing either had known since Frank's death.

* * * *

It is an August day, two years later; Victoire is sitting where we first saw her, six years before, in the window-seat of her old room at Polwhyn, having persuaded her aunt and uncle to come here to spend the autumn. When we first saw her she was writing to Raymond, to-day, two finished letters lie on the table, one to Raymond, the other to Nellie Lyndon, now very dear to her; we

will read part of that addressed to Raymond first.

"I am sorry for your intention of leaving England and trying your fortunes at the Indian bar, selfishly sorry, for I shall miss you very much.

"But not enough to answer your question as you wish. I cannot go with you, for I cannot give you the feeling I know a wife should have for a husband, and I will not give you less. That would not be happiness to you, to me it would be misery, for you would marry a woman and a shadow, a shadow dearer to her than any reality.

"I will not write more: if you knew how it hurts me to pain you, when I

think of the tender, patient kindness you have given me through these years, you would not be angry with me for telling you the truth.

"Yours ever,

"VICTOIRE."

The other letter runs thus :

"My dear Nellie,

"I was hardly surprised, but none the less glad of the news in your last letter. You will know how I hope for your and Mr. Gordon's happiness, and I am sure the hope will be fulfilled. Raymond tells me, in a letter, how long Mr. Gordon has cared for you. As to the slight difference of age, you and he are the best judges of that, and as for the other point you speak

of, dear, he is the only person who has a right to decide about it. If he does not care for what the world says of you, knowing it is false, why should you? But indeed, Nellie dear, I think the great part of 'the world' knows you as you are, and that you will live down every idle tale at last.

"You ask me to come and stay with you, when you are married; if you will have me, I shall be very glad to come,

"Your loving friend,

V. TREHERNE."

Victoire leant out of the window looking over the lawn below, where her uncle and the children were playing lawn-tennis, and nodded smilingly at her aunt and

Mrs. Onslow, who were looking on, embroidering crewels, chatting and eating apricots at once; then, as they looked away from her, her gaze grew deeper, as it roamed further across the rich orchards, to the wood and the river she loved, and further yet to the tender, western sky, beryl clear and fair.

"He is all mine now," she thought, "Nellie will forget him in her new husband's love; his memory is mine alone."

All the remembrance came back to her of the dear and gracious days that saw the "perilous goddess" born in their two hearts, of the fresh sweetness that had faded so soon; the morning of her life was over, noon had come, and with it the burden and heat of the day.

She was not unhappy, her life was occupied with pleasant work, "fair quiet and sweet rest;" perhaps after all she was as happy as she would have been, if things had been so ordered that she had married Frank; but the difference was that she did not think so.

THE END.

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